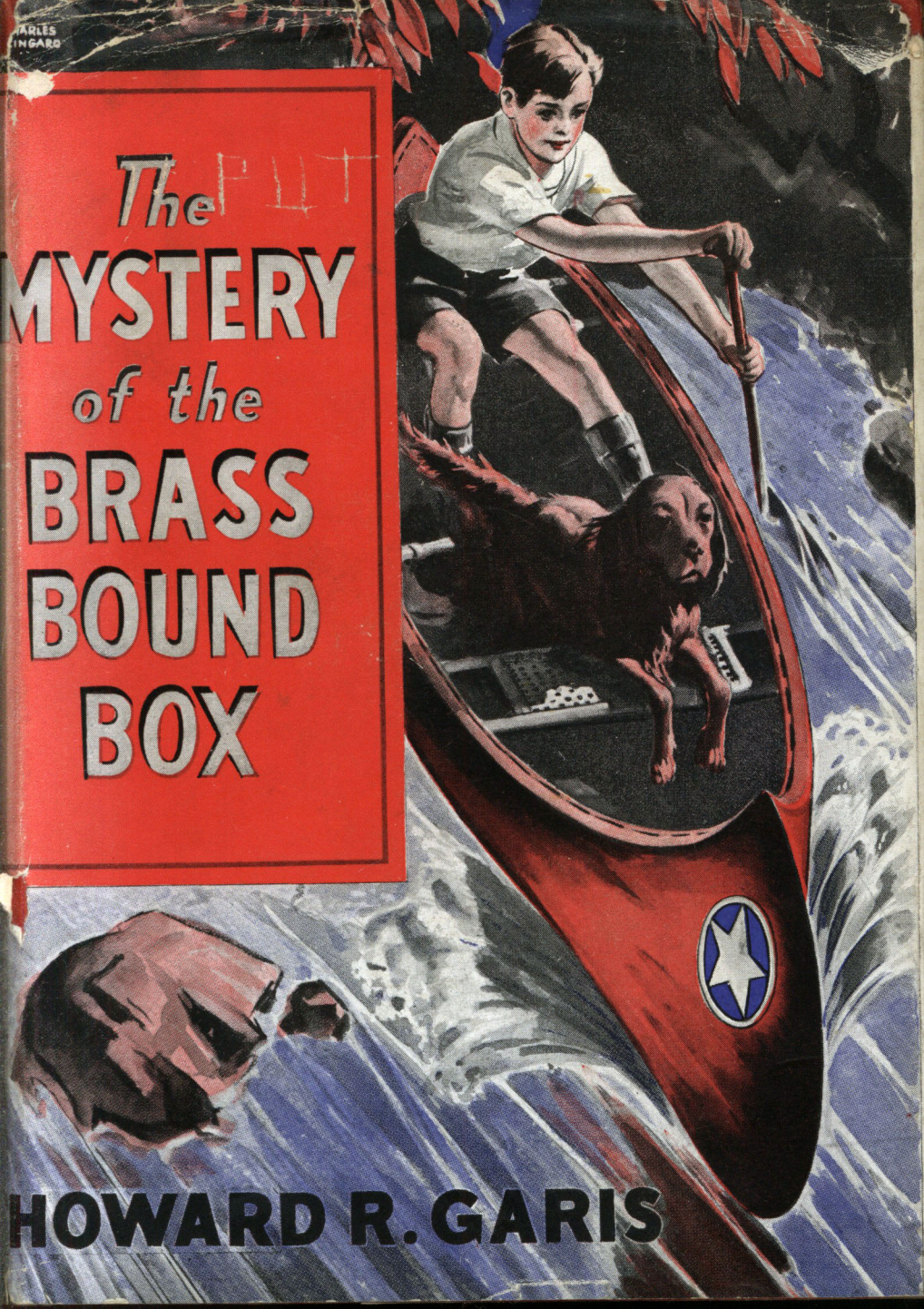


The
MYSTERY
of the
BRASS
BOUND
BOX



HOWARD R. GARIS

THE MYSTERY OF THE BRASS BOUND BOX

By Howard R. Garis

This is another in the Mystery Series which depicts in vivid fashion the further adventures of the lively Rick and his faithful dog, Ruddy. A cruise with Uncle Tod upon the motor boat *Sallie* leads to many mysterious and interesting experiences.

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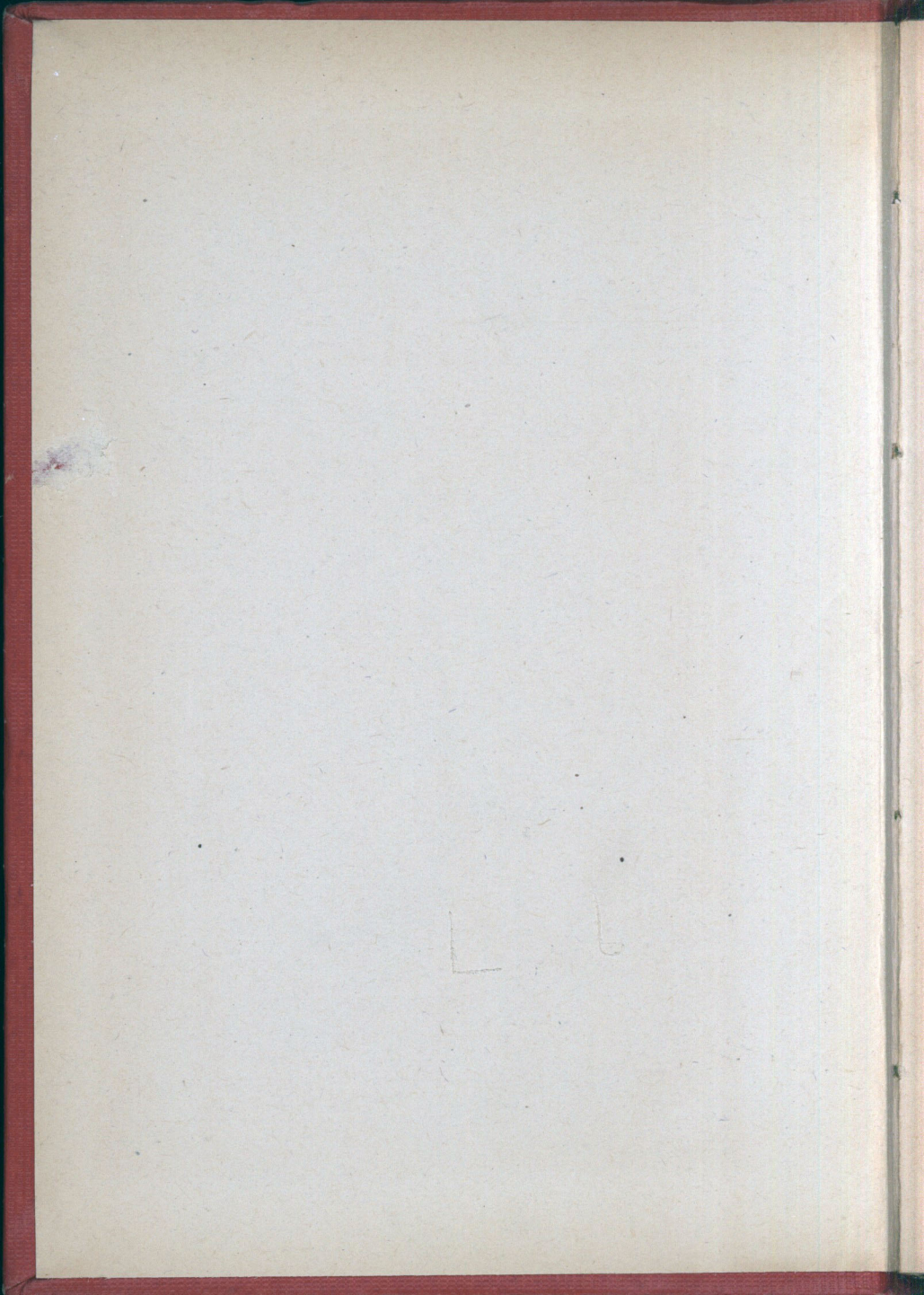
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"The monkey extended a tiny, hairy paw."

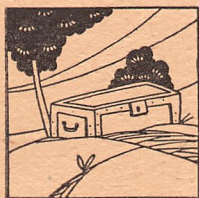
RICK AND RUDDY SERIES



**THE MYSTERY
OF THE BRASS
BOUND BOX**

• BY •

HOWARD R. GARIS



**McLOUGHLIN BROS., INC.
SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS**

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RICK AND RUDDY

CHAPTER I

OLD MAN IN THE WOODS

“WELL, what is it now, Ruddy? A rabbit? You know rabbits are out of season as well as I do! Come along!”

Rick paused under a big oak tree and glanced back at his dog. The red setter stood with one forefoot lifted, his nose pointed toward a clump of bushes. He was like a statue of bronze.

“Come on, Ruddy!” cried the boy again. “No use chasing squirrels—you ought to know that by this time!”

The dog gave a sudden, sharp and short bark. There was a movement of the underbrush and a small black and white animal, with a short, stumpy tail came slowly out. Again the dog barked.

“Ruddy, you dear old chump! Don’t you

know a porcupine when you see one?" yelled Rick, as he darted back toward his dog, to prevent the setter from attacking the spiny creature. "Do you want your mouth full of needles that'll go all the way through before you can pull 'em out? Let that hedgehog alone!"

When Rick talked this way Ruddy realized that it was best to obey, and he drew back, though with muttered growls deep in his throat. The porcupine was an animal distinctly different from cats or from the great white swans on Silver Lake—yet Ruddy did not see why this lowly creature was not fair game for him. He had never yet tackled a porcupine.

"And you don't want to," said Rick, as he realized the thoughts that must have been in his dog's mind. "You want to let those fellows alone, Rud! It isn't any fun to be stuck full of their quills. Course they can't shoot 'em, as Chot Benson claims, but those quills come out mighty easy, and one bite would fill your mouth so full you wouldn't have any appetite for dinner in over a week. Come on!"

With a final growl at the bristly porcupine, which was slowly ambling along as though he

knew he was safe from attack, the dog turned deeper into the woods with his young master.

Boy and dog were off for their usual Saturday hike in the forest. What adventures lay before them they knew not. All they cared about was the sun, which was shining down through the foliage of the trees; for the air which brought to them the sweet smell of the woods, for the leaves of last year which rustled under foot, and for the birds which sang. Adventures would take care of themselves.

But, had he only known it, Adventure, with a capital letter, lay just ahead of Rick, the presence all unsuspected as is so often the case.

As for Ruddy he was just glad to be alive, and with Rick. To the dog, with his keener sense of smell, the woods were filled with delight, for every breeze brought to him a whiff of something to be investigated, and this kept the setter racing here and there, poking his nose into strange nooks, under rotting logs and into decayed stumps. One of these periods of smell-investigation suddenly sent Ruddy back sneezing and whiffing, for he had sniffed up his nose a cloud of dry, rotten, punky dust.

"What's the matter?" cried Rick, as he ran

to where his canine companion had preceded him, down in a little glade. "Did you find another porcupine, and try to nip him?" For Ruddy was pawing at his nose and rolling over, trying to get rid of the irritating dry dust of the decayed wood. And then Rick caught some of the dust himself, and "ker-choood" vigorously, in company with his dog.

"You will poke your nose into strange places!" laughed the boy, when he had finished sneezing. "I'm glad you didn't stir up a skunk, though. It would be just like you!" For Ruddy was a most irresponsible dog when it came to these woodland excursions. He was so glad to run wild and free with Rick that he rushed into places where perhaps a less impulsive dog would have held back. And it was on one never-to-be-forgotten-occasion, of this kind that he had "met up" with a skunk; an event that was most disastrous for Rick and Ruddy.

However, on this occasion, no great harm had resulted from Ruddy's impulsive poking into the rotten stump, and the dog and boy were soon on their way again. They had no special objective. They were just roaming through

the woods, ready for whatever offered itself. Rick had a hazy idea that he might go fishing after a while—if he could get Chot Benson to come along. But the day was young yet—and the lure of the forest beckoned.

Rick and Ruddy were now within a few paces of the Great Adventure that awaited them, but all unconscious—as a movie title might put it—“of what fate had in store for them.”

As a matter of fact even when he saw “Fate” so to speak, right in front of him, Rick did not recognize the gentleman. For on this occasion Fate happened to be a gentleman—or at least a man—a rather unkempt and old man sitting on a log, muttering to himself.

As might have been expected, Ruddy first saw the old man of the woods. The dog, with a little warning growl, came to a stop, with one paw raised, as he had stood when he smelled the porcupine. Rick, who was looking for a birch tree, that he might nibble some of the spicy bark, doubly strong at this season when the sap was running, turned to see what had disturbed his dog. And so, Rick, too, saw the old man.

But so quietly had Rick and Ruddy made their way through the woods that the old man

on the log either did not hear them, or he purposely paid no attention, not even turning around, for he had his back toward them.

Rick was a Boy Scout and also a member of the Woodcraft League, and it was one of his delights, at times, to pretend to be an Indian, and to endeavor to go through the forest as silently as the Colonial Redmen were wont to do when on the warpath.

It was difficult, however to get Ruddy (who was an ex-Officio member of both the Scouts and the League) to appreciate the value of a silent journey, and at times, when Rick was proceeding along almost as quietly as a woodland shadow, the dog would crash through the underbrush, or give a joyous bark, thereby spoiling all his master's plans.

This time, though, both boy and dog had advanced with comparative silence, and so they came upon the old man without having him turn to look at them, proof, Rick thought, that the presence of himself and his dog was unknown.

"If I had been an Indian," Rick said afterward to Chot, "I could have sneaked up behind him and have taken his gun 'fore he would know I was there."

And it would seem that this might have been true in the light of what happened. For, seemingly unaware of the nearness of the boy and dog, the old man on the log began talking—to himself it appeared, as Rick saw no one else.

“I’ll do it!” exclaimed the old man. “It’s the only way to get at the truth—to get a look at those papers! I’ll play him to the limit! Crazy is as crazy does and I’ll go the limit! I guess this will be the end of Nick Slither! Crazy is as crazy does, and I’ll do it! Ha! Ha!”

The jolly laugh—for it was jolly—coming so closely after the impetuous words the man had uttered—and his manner was as impetuous as his words—gave Rick a start. As for Ruddy, he just stood there—again like a bronze statue in the sunlight—waiting.

Some movement on the part of the dog—a slight rustling in the dried leaves perhaps—or it may have been that the old man felt the presence of the two, becoming conscious of four bright eyes gazing intently at him—caused the sitter on the log to turn. At the same time Ruddy barked.

“Quiet!” ordered Rick, and Ruddy crouched at his master’s feet.

"Hello!" greeted the old man, and his voice was cheery and vigorous. And, now that he had turned, Rick could see that, though his hair was quite gray, the face framed by it was that of a man only about fifty years of age. And there was almost youthful vigor in the manner in which the stranger sprang over the log and advanced toward Rick and Ruddy.

"Hello!" he said again.

"Oh—hello!" responded Rick.

At first he had taken the man for a tramp, but a second look showed that though the clothing was not of the best, or newest, it was far from being the sort worn by wayfarers of the highway. Then, too, this man carried a suit case, which, though it showed signs of much travel, had, in its day, been of good quality.

"Live around here?" asked the man again.

"Right over there—about a mile," and Rick pointed toward his home.

"Then maybe you can set me right. I'm a bit off my course, and though I can navigate my own woods pretty well, I'm in strange waters here. I just heaved-to so I could get my bearings. There isn't any blazed trail here, as far as I can make out."

The man paused, surveyed Rick with a smile, and the boy, no less friendly, regarded the stranger with a puzzled look.

The odd combination of sea lingo and woodcraft talk had Rick "guessing," as he told Chot Benson afterward. There was something rather puzzling, too, in the old man's appearance. Though rather elderly he was hale and hearty, and when he walked he had a gait something between the roll of a sailor and the easy progress of a woodland scout.

"You haven't such a thing about you as a chart of these woods; have you, my boy?" asked the man.

"No," answered Rick, "but I can put you on the main road, or there's a path going through the woods, if you want that."

"What I want," said the stranger, "is to locate the home port of Mrs. Dalton. She—"

"My mother?" exclaimed and questioned Rick in the same breath.

"Your name Dalton?" demanded the stranger, sharply, as he set down the suit case.

"Yes, sir. Rick Dalton."

"Well, then I guess I've struck it right," said the old man of the woods with another ge-

nial smile. "I'm looking for a Mrs. Richard Dalton. If you wouldn't mind putting me on the right course—or even acting as convoy, I'd be obliged to you. Just put me within hail of your mother and tell her I'm her Uncle Tod."

"Uncle Tod?" repeated Rick, vaguely remembering having heard his mother speak of such a relative.

"Uncle Toddingham Belmont, to indulge in the luxury of my full name," chuckled the old man. "Rick, I'm glad to see you? This your dog?"

"Yes, this is Ruddy, and—"

But at that moment Ruddy, with a savage growl, made a dash for Uncle Tod's suit case which, to the surprise of Rick, suddenly began swaying backward and forward in a most mysterious manner.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE TOD'S BIG IDEA

RICK, no less than Ruddy, was surprised at the action of Uncle Tod's suit case. For the yellow bag, standing upright on one narrow end, near the log where the old man had been sitting, kept on swaying and waving to and fro like some oriental dancer, or a snake in response to the whining pipe of an Indian Fakir.

The dog rushed up as close as he could get to the case and there stood barking, looking back every now and then, to see why Rick did not come to investigate. And Rick would have done so except for the action of Uncle Tod. The old man laughed heartily and was half bent over in his spasm of mirth.

"Ruddy! Come here!" ordered Rick.

"Oh, let him alone!" chuckled Uncle Tod. "He won't hurt anything. Zippo can't get out and Ruddy can't get in at him."

"Zippo" echoed Rick. "Who—who is he—or it?"

He added the last as there did not seem to be any possibility of a live person being inside the rather small suit case.

"Zippo is a pet monkey," said Uncle Tod. "I put him in my suit case to bring to your mother as a present. And I suppose Zippo is tired of being shut up. That's why he's jumping about."

Certainly something was jumping about in the leather bag, and it was evident that this movement from within caused the queer swaying motion that had so startled, and then angered, Ruddy. For the setter was barking angrily, as he had once barked when a savage dog tried to attack Mazie, Rick's sister.

"Come here, Ruddy!" ordered the boy again. And now, the swaying of the suit case having stopped, the dog ceased his barks, though he growled deep down in his throat, and looked questioningly at his master.

"It's all right, old fellow," said the boy, soothingly.

"I hope they'll be friends," went on Uncle Tod, as he walked back toward his case, and,

as he approached it, the bag again began to sway in that weird fashion, once more causing Ruddy to leap up with a series of barks.

"Quiet! Down!" ordered Rick. "Ruddy will do just as I tell him," he said to Uncle Tod, "and he'll even make friends with cats if I want him to."

"Good dog who'll do that. Regular old sea dog, I'd say," declared the elderly man.

"He did come from the sea!" spoke Rick quickly. "I got him out of the water in a big storm."

"You did?" cried Uncle Tod. "Tell me about him. Here, Ruddy! Let's you and I be friends, and then I'll make you acquainted with Zippo! Yes, old chap, I'll soon let you out," he added, speaking to, or at, the suit case, and it ceased its waving motion. "Tell me about Ruddy—the old sea dog, Rick!" I'm a sort of old sea dog myself."

"I thought you were a sailor," said Rick. Thereupon he related the story of how Ruddy had come to him out of the storm—a tale that is fully set forth in the first volume of this series—in the book "Rick and Ruddy."

"And so Ruddy and I have been chums ever

since," said the boy. "He's always with me. We went to camp last year."

"Camp? That's fine! I have a sort of a camp, myself."

"You have? Where?" asked Rick eagerly.

"Oh, quite a ways from here, on the banks of a big river. I've had many a tussle with that river, too, and many adventures on it."

"Ruddy and I had adventures in camp," said Rick. And to those of you who might be interested in those same adventures I recommend the reading of the volume just preceding this present one—entitled "Rick and Ruddy in Camp."

"Well, Ruddy surely is quite a dog!" complimented Uncle Tod. "And now, not to keep him too excited, I'll introduce him to Zippo. But I'll rely on you to hold him in check, Rick. He may go a bit wild over my monkey."

The suit case was opened and out of it peered a wizened little face, seemingly of an old, old and very tiny man. There was a querulous, chattering voice, and then the little bundle of fur made a leap and perched on Uncle Tod's shoulder, while Ruddy let out a series of excited barks.

"Quiet, Ruddy! Down!" commanded Rick, and the dog grew silent.

"This is Zippo," said Uncle Tod, stroking the monkey perched on his shoulder, whereat the jungle creature seemed to murmur happily. "Now how are you going to make Ruddy know him, so they won't fight."

"I'll show you," answered Rick. "Will you please put Zippo down on the log near you." Uncle Tod sat down on the same fallen tree where Rick had first seen him, and had heard him muttering to himself in words the meaning of which the boy was even then guessing at.

"Quiet, Zippo," commanded Uncle Tod, and the monkey, which had been trying to again climb up on his master's shoulder, nestled close against the old man as he sat on the log.

"Ruddy, this is a friend of mine! He's going to be a friend of yours, too. Don't bite him! Be good to him!" said Rick in a slow, steady voice, pointing toward Zippo, and at the same time stroking Ruddy's bronze head. "Now shake paws!"

Ruddy held out one paw obediently toward the monkey.

"Say, you *have* got him trained!" exclaimed

the admiring old sailor. "But so have I Zippo! Look! Zippo!" he ordered. "Shake!"

Immediately, as Ruddy had done, the monkey extended a tiny, hairy paw, and, though trembling with fear, he grasped Ruddy's larger foot.

"There!" laughed Rick, as Ruddy, with a sort of half-ashamed air, dropped his paw. "Now they're friends for life!"

"Good!" exclaimed Uncle Tod. "Do you think your mother would like Zippo?" he asked. "I brought him along to give her as a pet. He'll be company for her when you are gone."

"When I'm gone?" echoed Rick. "Why I'm not going anywhere. I don't believe I'm even going camping this year, though I want to—a lot!"

"Oh, yes you are going!" laughed Uncle Tod. "You're going with me, if I can bring it about. I haven't told you my big idea yet; have I?"

"No," answered Rick slowly, "you haven't." And, for an instant he began to feel just a little bit afraid of Uncle Tod. After all, was this strange man, who carried a pet monkey about

in a suit case, really what he claimed to be? Rick wondered.

"No, I haven't told you my big idea yet," chuckled Uncle Tod. "But I will when we get to your house. Do you think your mother would like Zippo?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," answered Rick doubtfully. "But I'm sure Mazie would."

"Who's Mazie?"

"My sister."

"Oh, yes, I had almost forgotten about her. You see it's some time since I've seen your mother, and I don't suppose I would now, only for what's happened."

"What has happened?" asked Rick. He was beginning to have a hazy notion that he was on the verge of a Great Adventure; a notion that was soon to be greatly strengthened.

"Lots of things have happened," said Uncle Tod. "They've not finished happening yet, either. But I'd better explain to your mother first—I'd better tell her about my big idea. It came to me after I'd seen you."

Rick wondered what he had to do with Uncle Tod's big idea, but just at present the boy

was more concerned over how Ruddy would behave toward Zippo. Rick had given his word that the dog would make friends with the monkey, and he wanted to be sure of this.

However there seemed to be nothing to worry about, for once Zippo found he was no longer barked at, and that Ruddy's sniffing and snuffing was only in the most friendly spirit, the monkey began to make similar advances.

"I guess they'll be all right," ventured Rick.

"Looks so," agreed Uncle Tod. "I've had Zippo for quite a few years—got him when I was down in South America. But now I have a new lot of plans under way, and I can't look after Zippo so well. So, when I found I had to come down this way, I just brought him along. Do you think Mazie would like him?"

"I know she would, but maybe mother—"

Rick paused. It did not seem very friendly to suggest that perhaps his mother would be afraid of the little monkey. Mrs. Dalton, though she liked dogs and cats, stopped there when it came to taking an interest in natural history.

"When she sees how cute and cunning Zippo is, and how gentle and kind and clean—he's the

cleanest monkey I ever saw!" the old sailor said earnestly—"when she knows what a pet he'll make when I'm gone—and you're gone—why she'll surely want him."

"Say, what makes you keep saying I'm going somewhere?" asked Rick, earnestly, and with a strange look at Uncle Tod.

"Because you *are* going with me!" chuckled the old sailor. "I need a boy like you to cruise along—you and your dog. You'd like to come on a cruise; wouldn't you?"

"You said it!" exclaimed Rick, earnestly if a bit slangily. "Where to?"

"Oh, you'll hear all that when I tell about my big idea!" answered Uncle Tod. "The main thing now is for me to get this monkey to your mother—or to Mazie, whoever wants him—and then—"

"Oh, it will be Mazie who'll want him!" interrupted Rick. "She always wanted a pet ever since I had Ruddy," and he looked toward his dog, who was lying quietly beside the log, on which Zippo was perched. Dog and monkey had now established a friendship.

"Well, Mazie shall have Zippo then, if your mother doesn't want him," promised Uncle

Tod. "I s'pose Ruddy will feel more free on the cruise, if Zippo isn't along."

"Oh, if Ruddy and I are going on a cruise!" cried Rick, in joyous accents—"Oh boy! Crackie! What luck!" and he turned a hand-spring on the leaf-covered ground, an act which sent Zippo chattering in fear to the shelter of his master's shoulder.

CHAPTER III

OFF ON THE CRUISE

MAZIE DALTON came flying back from the front gate, where she had been stationed for some time, looking down the street to catch a glimpse of Rick and Ruddy. Rick had promised to come home to dinner, but this was always an uncertain promise when made on Saturday morning. Now that the hour for the meal was at hand, Mazie was anxious her brother should come. She had baked a pie, "all by herself," and she wanted his opinion. Not that it would not be favorable, for to Rick all pie was pie, and welcome grist to his hungry stomach. But Mazie wanted to watch him eat her own special pastry.

"Oh, Mother!" cried Mazie, fairly leaping into the kitchen, "Rick is coming, and there's a strange man with him and he's got a monkey perched on his shoulder!"

"Who has?" asked Mrs. Dalton, looking up from the oven.

"The strange man has! And Oh, mother—there's a big dab of flour on the end of your nose!"

"Well, it's a wonder I'm not *all* flour with the baking that's been going on this morning!" laughed Mrs. Dalton. "But what's this about Rick and a monkey?"

"Rick's coming along with a strange man and there's a monkey—on the strange man's shoulder, and Ruddy, he's barking and—"

But at that moment shadows darkened the doorway, and Mrs. Dalton glancing up saw her son and the old man looking at her. So, also, gazed Zippo, his little wizened face close beside that of the sailor.

"Hello, *Schotziel*!" exclaimed Rick's companion of the woods.

"Oh—Oh—why, it's *Uncle Tod*!" cried Mrs. Dalton, and the next moment she was warmly greeting the stranger. Rick's doubts as to the identity of his companion vanished in the fervor of his mother's welcome.

"Well, Schotzie, you look about the same!" remarked Uncle Tod (as he sat down in a chair, and stroked the monkey). "I suppose you're surprised to see me."

"*Surprised!* I should say so. We haven't heard a word from you in over a year and—"

"I know. I've been out west. Now I'm back east again and I figure on settling down. I've bought a little place on Long River. I'd like to have you see it, Schotzie!"

"What makes him call you *Schotzie?*" asked Rick of his mother.

"It's a pet name I gave her when she was a little girl," explained Uncle Tod. "We had a Polish servant girl, and she called your mother what sounded to me like the word 'Schotzie.' Come to find out later that wasn't exactly it, but it means 'sister' in Polish. So I got to calling your mother that."

"I'd almost forgotten it myself," laughed Mrs. Dalton. "And I had almost forgotten you."

"I'm glad you didn't—altogether!" said Uncle Tod. "And so that you will not again forget me I'm going to leave you Zippo! Here, Zippo, shake paws with Schotzie!"

He took the little monkey up in his arms and held it out toward his niece. Mrs. Dalton shrank back, even though the wizened little jungle creature held out a hairy paw in the

friendliest way imaginable. But Mazie, eager to see the animal, pressed forward, so it was with her that Zippo shook hands, or, rather paws.

"Oh, isn't he a darling!" murmured Mazie.

"Oh, I love him!"

"I told you she'd like him!" exclaimed Rick.

"He's yours, Mazie!"

"Mine?"

"If Schotzie doesn't want him—I mean, if your mother doesn't," said Uncle Tod. "I can't take him with me. Rick, Ruddy and I are going away on a cruise."

"Rick!" cried his mother. "What is this?"

"I don't know much more about it than you do," answered the boy. "I saw Uncle Tod in the woods—he was sort of talking to himself, and I—"

"You thought me a bit off—crazy; didn't you?" interrupted the old sailor.

"Well," said Rick slowly, "I—er—"

"Oh, I don't mind being called that!" laughed Uncle Tod. "I'm used to it by this time. But, Schotzie, not to keep up the mystery any longer, I'll explain. I had some business down here on the coast, and now that I've finished it I came

to find you. I'd forgotten exactly where you lived, for it's a long while since we exchanged letters. But I was cruising around in the offing, when I met up with Rick here. There was no blazed trail to your cabin, but he showed me the way—he and Ruddy.”

“You ought to see Ruddy go wild when the suit case wobbled like a snake dancing!” exclaimed Rick.

“What suit case?” asked Mazie, who was now petting the monkey.

“Oh, I had Zippo in the suit case—I carry him about with me in that way,” explained Uncle Tod. “The case was setting on end, and when Zippo moved about inside, the old bag began to wobble. I suppose it did look rather mysterious to the dog. But they soon made up—he and Zippo.”

“What's this about you and Rick going on a cruise?” asked Mrs. Dalton. “Tell me about it.”

“It's a part of my big idea!” chuckled Uncle Tod. “As I told you, I have bought a place on Long River. That's in another state, several hundred miles from here. I have given up the sea, but I don't want to settle down and be a

complete land lubber, so I've bought me a little motor boat."

"A little motor boat!" cried Rick. His one aim in life had been to own a craft like that.

"Well, she isn't so very little," went on Uncle Tod. "She'll sleep four, as they say, and on a pinch five can snooze aboard."

"But what do you want of a motor boat?" asked Mrs. Dalton, looking at Mazie, who, by this time, was so friendly with the monkey that he was sitting in her lap eating bits of banana.

"Well, as I said, I don't want to be a complete land lubber, and, as I'm getting too old for a salt water cruise, I've decided to try fresh. My place is right on Long River, and I want a boat to use when I feel like it.

"So I came to Belemere, bought this craft, and christened her *Sallie*. I'm going to navigate her back to my place, and, not wanting to sail alone, I came to get Rick. To tell you the truth I didn't know, until I saw him in the woods, what a big chap your boy had grown into, Schotzie. But as soon as I saw him I got my big idea—that is the idea of having him come on the cruise with me. We can work our way

into Long River and down that to my place. It may take us several weeks, but I'm in no hurry. So if you'll agree, Rick and I will go cruising, and we'll leave Zippo here to keep you company."

"Oh, may I really have him?" asked the delighted Mazie.

"That's what I brought him for," answered Uncle Tod. "I'm very fond of him, and he is of me, but he'll make up with you all right. And when Rick and I are cruising around it will be a comfort to know you have company. How soon can you be ready, Rick?"

"In about ten minutes," answered the boy. "Ruddy's coming," he added to his mother.

"Oh, but I haven't yet said you can go," she answered. "We'll have to talk it over with your father."

"I guess Dick will say it's all right!" chuckled Uncle Tod. "He will if he's anything like he used to be—fond of adventures."

"I guess he'd like to come himself," said Rick. "He let me go camping last year. Mother, don't you think he'll let me go cruising with Uncle Tod? I can take Ruddy."

"Well, we'll see about it," spoke Mrs. Dalton. "You're going to stay a while; aren't you?" she asked her uncle.

"Why a day or so, maybe. There are a few things that need patching up on the *Sallie* before we start cruising. And when we get to my place, on Long River, why—well, we'll talk of that later!"

Uncle Tod seemed suddenly to change the subject, and Rick thought his mother's relative had some secret he did not want to reveal. To Rick's mind recurred the scene in the woods, when he had seen the strange old man seated on a log, muttering something about "crazy is as crazy does," and mentioning a name like Nick Slither.

"Whose boat did you buy?" asked Rick, for he knew most of the craft in and about Bellemere.

"It belonged to a chap named Sig Bailey," answered Uncle Tod.

"He's the coast guard who found Ruddy, a little puppy in the storm," Rick exclaimed. "He has two or three boats."

"I bought the largest," said Uncle Tod.

"I think we'll have a good time cruising in her, Rick."

"I know we will!" cried the boy. "That is if I can go!"

There was no difficulty over this when Mr. Dalton came home and met Uncle Tod. It was almost the close of school for the summer and Rick could leave without injuring his chances for promotion, his teacher said.

"My! But you're lucky!" exclaimed Chot Benson, when he came over to find Rick in the midst of packing his clothes. "To go off on a cruise with your uncle—"

"He isn't my uncle; he's mother's," broke in Rick, who felt sorry for Chot.

"Well, it's pretty nearly the same thing. To go off on a cruise with your dog—Oh, but I wish I could go!"

"Do you?" asked a voice at the door, and looking up the two boys saw Uncle Tod.

"Do I?" echoed Chot. "I'd give all the money I've got saved up—course it isn't such an awful lot, but—"

"Would your folks let you go?" interrupted the old sailor.

"Sure they would! Shall I go ask 'em?" eagerly cried Rick's best chum.

"Yes," nodded Uncle Tod. "Wait a minute!" he called, as Chot was dashing down the stairs. "I'd better go with you and explain."

"I'll come, too!" offered Rick. "Oh, if Chot and I can go together, and with Ruddy— Oh boy—!"

And it developed that Chot could go. To the boy's own delight, and that of Rick, Mr. Benson said he would be glad to have his son get the experience that would be sure to follow a trip in the *Sallie*. Chot was doing well enough at school so he could leave a few weeks before the close of the term as Rick had done. And two happier boys you never saw.

"Don't you wish you were going, Mazie?" Chot asked as he and Rick packed and repacked, for they were always thinking of something else they wanted to take with them.

"No, I'd rather stay home here with Zippo," Mazie answered. "I love my monkey!"

"Well, we'll tell you all about it when we get back," kindly offered Rick. And there was a great deal more to tell than he had any idea

there would be—adventures of danger and daring to relate.

“Well, if we’re all ready let’s get started,” said Captain Tod one morning, when they had gone aboard the motor boat *Sallie*, which was finally in shape for cruising.

“Take good care of the boys!” begged Mrs. Dalton, who with her husband and Mazie, and in company with Chot’s father and mother had come down to the dock to see the start of the cruise.

“I will,” promised Captain Tod, as he was called of late—more often than “Uncle Tod.”

“I’ll take good care of Zippo!” called Mazie. “Getting him for a pet was like getting a surprise.”

“And I think that isn’t going to be the only surprise of this cruise,” murmured Uncle Tod. Rick was on the verge of asking his uncle, as he thought of it, what was meant, but just then Ruddy saw a dog with whom he was acquainted, and started to leave the *Sallie* to rub noses and otherwise exchange ideas.

“Come back!” cried Rick.

“All aboard!” shouted Captain Tod.

“Good-bye!” called those on shore.

“Take the wheel, Rick, and I’ll look after the motor,” ordered the jolly skipper. He went below into the motor compartment. There was a chugging sound as the machinery turned over, and then came a loud explosion, and Captain Tod came tumbling up to the after deck, his face all black, while a cloud of murky smoke followed him.

CHAPTER IV

GLORIOUS DAYS

RUDDY'S loud barking followed the explosion and the sudden appearance of Captain Tod on deck in "black-face make-up," was the only sound that, for the first few seconds, relieved the tense situation. For Ruddy was quite excited. Perhaps he thought someone had shot a gun, and, being a hunting dog by instinct, he must have wondered when he was supposed to go after the game. Then, too, he may have taken Captain Tod for a stranger. Certainly the skipper of the *Sallie* did not seem at all like himself, that is as far as his face was concerned.

"Oh, what happened?" cried Mrs. Dalton.

"Is the boat going to sink?" asked Mrs. Benson. "If it is, Chot, you'd better come ashore!"

Mazie had moved over closer to her father, and she was glad she had not brought her monkey Zippo to the dock to bid Rick and Ruddy

good-bye. For Zippo, now regarded as Mazie's pet, had been left home.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Tod?" asked Chot's father, as he leaped down to the deck of the boat from the pier, the *Sallie* having floated out a little way from the string piece.

Captain Tod's answer was a hearty laugh, which, after all, was the best reply possible. He continued to laugh as he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his face, and he laughed harder than ever when he saw streaks of black on the white linen.

"Ha! Ha!" roared the skipper. "It's my own fault! Sig Bailey told me never to turn the flywheel over the first time with the electric switch on, and that's just what I did. It's my own fault. I should have known better."

"Did she back-fire?" asked Rick, who knew something about motor boats.

"That's what she did, Rick—back-fired right in my face. But I heard it coming and leaped away in time, so there's no harm done. Only I'll need a swabbing!" and again the captain laughed as he wiped his blackened face.

"Are you sure there's no danger?" asked Mrs. Dalton anxiously.

"Not a bit!" Uncle Tod assured her, as the boat slowly drifted. "You see it's this way. To get the motor started I have to turn the flywheel over. This sucks gas up into the cylinders, and an electric spark explodes the gas. But this time the explosion took place in the muffler, or in some place where it wasn't supposed to, because I turned on the electric spark too soon. Sig warned me about it. Well, there's one thing—I'll know better next time!"

It was out of the question for any one to worry over what had happened when Uncle Tod's hearty laugh was heard, and the skipper seemed to think it was the best joke of many a long day. He sat down on the deck, laughed again as he mopped his face, making the handkerchief blacker than before, and then he wiped his eyes and said:

"Well, I'll try it again. This time I think we'll get started. This ought to bring us good luck."

"How?" asked Rick, as the captain started down the short companionway that led to the motor compartment. "How good luck?"

"Well, the folks can say good-bye over again,

and the more good wishes you have the better the luck; isn't that so?"

"I guess it is!" laughed Rick. "Anyhow I'm glad you aren't hurt!"

"Oh, it takes more than this to hurt me!" declared Uncle Tod. "Now don't worry, folks," he said to the fathers and mothers on shore. "I won't make this mistake again, and I'll look after the boys good and proper! They'll be all right, and so will Ruddy, too!"

The red setter was as excited as either Rick or Chot over getting off. It must be said, though, that the two mothers were a bit anxious, but if the fathers were they did not show it.

From the forward space below the trunk cabin, where the motor was located, came a chugging sound. At first it was fitful, and then it settled into a throbbing roar which told that Captain Tod had been successful in starting the engine without any more back-firing. He came out on the low deck, just aft of the trunk cabin, and spun the wheel both ways to see that it was in working order.

"Now you take the wheel again, Rick," he said, "and put us out into the channel. Chot,

you come below with me and I'll teach you how to work the motor. I guess we're off now—good-bye, folks!"

"Good-bye!" came in chorus from those on shore.

Rick held the wheel. Below, Captain Tod showed Chot how to throw over the lever that put the already moving motor in gear with the propeller shaft. The blades churned the water, and the *Sallie* moved out into the little bay which she was to traverse before beginning her inland waterway journey to Long River and Captain Tod's distant home.

Rick waved to his folks on the dock, and Ruddy barked his farewell. Many things were to happen before boy and dog saw their home port again.

Once the motor was running well, and it was seen that the oiling system was operating, there was nothing for Captain Tod and Chot to do below, so they came up on deck, in time to wave more good-byes. Then, as Rick steered, for he was familiar with the channel—more so than Captain Tod—the latter and Chot sat down and watched the passing scenes.

Belemere, where Rick had lived nearly all his

life, was a typical, small seacoast town, and somewhat of a summer resort, though the season's visitors had not yet begun arriving. For the boys there was nothing to look at that they had not seen many times before, yet now everything seemed to take on a different appearance. They looked at things with new eyes because of the cruise they were taking. They seemed more important, even to themselves, and they could not help feeling sorry for other boys—their chums and acquaintances—who were busy about such prosaic labors as bailing out boats or setting off for the clamming grounds in old and leaky "tubs."

"Hi, Rick, where you going?" cried Jack Slade, a lad with whom our hero had clashed the previous summer.

"Oh, off on a cruise—with Uncle Tod," came back the answer.

"You're lucky!" said Jack. "Ruddy's going, too!" he added, as he caught a glimpse of the dog. "Hi, Ruddy, old boy!"

Ruddy barked joyously in answer, though there had been a time, not so long ago, when he would have growled and have shown his teeth to Jack. But that was before Jack learned to

know and love animals. Rick had taught him that lesson, with the help of Ruddy.

"Well, we're off to a fair start," observed Uncle Tod, as he sat at his ease on the deck behind the trunk cabin. "Everything's in our favor—even the weather."

It was a glorious day, with the sun shining from a cloudless blue sky above. In and out among the many harbor craft Rick guided the *Sallie*. It was not the first time he had navigated like this, but it was the first time he had ever felt as though he was part owner in a craft—and he felt this way now.

"How far will we go to-day?" asked Chot, as he leaned over to pat Ruddy's head.

"This cruise is to be a sort of go-as-you-please-race," answered Captain Tod. "We don't have to get to any special place at any special time; though I have a certain plan in mind," he added. Rick wondered what this plan was, and if it had anything to do with the strange talk of Uncle Tod in the woods, when he had muttered about Nick Slither. "So we'll cruise along until we're tired, or until something happens, and then we'll tie up and serve mess."

"Are we going to eat on the boat?" asked Chot, who had not yet been told all the details of the cruise.

"You'd say so, if you saw all the grub we've laid in!" chuckled Rick. "Wouldn't he, Uncle Tod?"

"Well, we have enough for a while," admitted the skipper. "But if we want anything special we can go ashore for it. We won't be very far from shore at any time on our cruise," he added. "Some day, if this trip is a success, we may try another, farther out."

"Will you take me?" asked Rick.

"Maybe," answered Uncle Tod with a smile, "and Chot also."

"Thanks!" exclaimed both boys.

They cruised slowly along until noon, when Captain Tod, with a laugh, struck eight bells and said he would take the wheel while the boys ate lunch in the cabin. The skipper had set it out for them, and the lads voted it the best meal they had ever tasted.

"Better even than camp!" declared Rick.

"That's right!" agreed Chot.

Chot was given a chance to steer, under the guidance of Rick, while the captain was at his

meal, for they were now well out of the harbor where there were few craft, making the danger of collision very slight.

The glorious day of their start was followed by another, after a night during which they tied up at a small fishing village some distance from Belemere.

"There's no need cruising along at night," Captain Tod decided, "as long as we aren't in any hurry. And I think too much of the *Sallie* to run any chances with her."

Rick and Chot were beginning to fear their cruise was to have no excitement, so peaceful were the first three days. They would even have welcomed a storm.

Thus matters stood on the third night when they tied up to a dock in a harbor at a place where neither of the three voyagers had ever before stopped.

"I don't just like this berth," murmured Captain Tod, when he had made arrangements for stopping at a certain pier.

"Why not?" asked Rick.

"Too many rough characters hanging around the docks. I wouldn't go so far as to say they'd take our boat, but if there was anything

loose left on deck it might be missing in the morning," the captain answered.

"Had we better stand watch?" Chot wanted to know. He felt a certain thrill as he asked this, and he hoped Captain Tod would say this would be necessary. But the skipper answered:

"Oh, I don't believe we need to do that. Ruddy will be watch enough."

"He'll surely give the alarm," declared Rick. "We'll let him sleep on deck."

The night was warm so that this would be no hardship for the dog, and when the three turned into the comfortable bunks, Ruddy stretched out on a piece of carpet beneath the steering wheel, which was geared to the outside after partition of the trunk cabin.

It was well past midnight, as Rick saw by the craft's cabin clock, when he heard Ruddy moving about on the deck over his head, and listened to a low growl from the dog.

"Some one is trying to board us!" thought Rick, as he quietly slid out of his bunk.

CHAPTER V

RUDDY AND GOLDBLOCKS

RICK silently began to ascend the companionway steps that led to the deck, just as Ruddy broke into a series of fierce barks that followed his ominous growls of warning.

"What's the matter?" called Uncle Tod, poking his head from his bunk.

"Is it morning?" Chot wanted to know.

Certainly this was noise enough to scare off any intruder, Rick mentally decided, and he thought it a bit regretfully, for he wanted the honor of catching, single handed, some harbor thief who might have come aboard to pick up whatever was lying around loose.

"I heard a noise on deck, and Ruddy growled," said Rick, in answer to the questions of his companions.

In an instant Captain Tod was out of his berth, and, reaching back under his pillow, he brought forth his hand clasping an automatic pistol. Chot followed the example of the

skipper, as far as getting out of bed was concerned, but of course Chot had no gun.

By this time Rick had emerged on deck, and by the light of the lantern which was kept aglow under the harbor rules, the boy saw Ruddy standing at the rail, looking into the dark shadows that enshrouded the pier, and growling ominously.

"What is it, old fellow?" asked Rick, of his dog. "Did some one try to come on board?"

Ruddy whined, and if ever a dog tried to answer, the red setter did then. He was doing his best to tell what had happened.

Rick heard stealthy footsteps moving off up the long pier, and Captain Tod coming on deck then, clad only in his pajamas, as were Rick and Chot, sent a challenge through the night of:

"Who's there?"

No answer came.

"I'm ready to shoot!" warned the skipper, as Ruddy added his bark of defiance to the words of the skipper.

Again there was no reply. Not even the footsteps were audible now.

"I guess we scared 'em off," commented Uncle Tod. "What happened, Rick? I don't

usually sleep so sound as this. The least noise wakes me. What happened?"

"I don't know. Ruddy's bark aroused me, and then I heard a noise on deck that I knew Ruddy didn't make."

"Just sneak thieves I reckon," commented the skipper. "We'll take a look though. Guess we don't need to bother to dress. Nobody will see us if we turn up the lights."

The *Sallie* was equipped with a small electric lighting system; the incandescents being operated by a small dynamo when the engine was running, and by a storage battery during other times. It was the work of but a moment to switch on the deck lights, and though the three voyagers stood revealed in their night garments, there was none to see them.

"Guess he didn't get anything," said the captain, looking about the deck. Indeed there was little that could have been taken unless the cabin had been entered.

"Good dog, Ruddy!" complimented Chot, as the setter nosed about his legs, once putting his cold nose on Chot's bare ankle, and thereby causing that lad to emit a little yelp of surprise.

"What's wrong over there?" called a voice from out of the darkness of the pier. It was a voice seeming to have authority.

"Who are you?" asked Captain Tod.

"The dock watchman. What's wrong?"

"Some sneak thief tried to board us, I guess," was the answer. "See anything of him out at your end?"

There was the flickering of a lantern being swung to and fro, and then a voice, coming nearer, answered:

"Nobody here. I'll come and have a look."

"Reckon you're too late," chuckled Uncle Tod. "He got away whoever he was, but he didn't take anything."

Further investigation on the part of the dock watchman disclosed nothing more than Rick had seen when he first leaped up on deck, and after talking matters over with the pier sentry, the captain advising him to keep his eyes "peeled" for the remainder of the night, our friends again turned in.

The morning dawned, or, rather, it hazed up, for the sun had no sooner peeped above the horizon than clouds began to form, and by the

time breakfast was over a drizzling rain had set in.

"Oh, well, it wouldn't be fun to have fair weather all the while; would it?" asked Rick of Chot, as they donned their oilskins, for they would not miss this chance of wearing them.

"I like a good rain once in a while," declared Chot.

"It keeps down the sea dust; doesn't it?" chuckled Uncle Tod. "Well, might as well get under way, I reckon. No use hanging around here, with the chance that some sneak thief will board us."

A further and more careful search by daylight revealed nothing wrong on board the *Sallie*, and when the breakfast things had been stowed away, and everything made "shipshape and Bristol fashion," the motor was started and they slowly wended their way out of the little harbor.

The route our friends were to take was rather a roundabout and devious one, because of the fact that they could not go far outside in the *Sallie*. Though built for fairly rough weather, she could not stand a storm far out at sea. And, indeed, Uncle Tod could not have reached

his "camp" as he called it, on Long River, except by going through a system of inland waterways, consisting of rivers, creeks, bays and lakes. He could have saved some time, if he had wished, by standing out to sea for a day or so, and cutting through an inlet. But time was no object and he preferred safety to speed.

So they proceeded along leisurely, the lads enjoying every minute of it, and Ruddy no less, I am sure. For Ruddy it was happiness just to be with Rick and his boy friends, and now Uncle Tod was numbered in this favored class.

To the three friends—no, four, for I will include Ruddy in this—Uncle Tod told the boys something of his varied life. He had been a deep sea sailor, and after giving that up he had been out west, trying his hand at prospecting and mining. So he was a true son of the great outdoors—able to hold his own afloat or ashore. He could navigate his way around the world, or, set down in a dense forest, he could take care of himself with almost the skill of an Indian or a trapper.

"Only I did get a bit puzzled when I was on my way to your house, Rick," the captain had to admit with a laugh.

“How did you happen to come down here to buy a boat?” asked Rick. “Couldn’t you get one nearer home—I mean your home?”

“I haven’t got a regular home yet,” admitted the skipper, with something like a sigh. “It’s hard to settle down after you’ve been a rover for as many years as I have. But I aim to have a home if things turn out right.” Just what these things were the captain did not say.

“I’m sort of camping out, up there on Long River,” he went on. “Another man and I own some property. But I got tired of—well, of waiting for things to happen, and so I got a sort of scheme into my head that I’d like a boat. I didn’t stop to think I might get one nearer home,” he admitted. “I happened to remember that your mother, Rick, lived near the sea, and I thought I’d sort of put salt on two birds’ tails with one anchor, so to speak—come and see her, attend to some business matters, and get a craft. And I did it! Now I’m going to see if I can work out the rest of the puzzle.”

“What puzzle?” asked Chot, wonderingly.

“Oh, one I have in my mind,” said the skipper. “Look out there, Chot!” he called sharply. “Mind your helm!”

Chot had been given charge of the *Sallie* for the time being, and he was guiding the boat through a little fleet of clamming schooners, which with sails set, were drifting down the bay, the clam "rakes," on long lines, trailing over the side. As the boats drifted broadside before the misty wind, the long prongs of the rake scraped the bottom of the bay, gathering in the hard clams. Every so often some men would haul in on the lines to which the curved "rakes" were attached, and from the mass of débris, stones and mud that was gathered, would pick out the good clams, tossing the residue overboard.

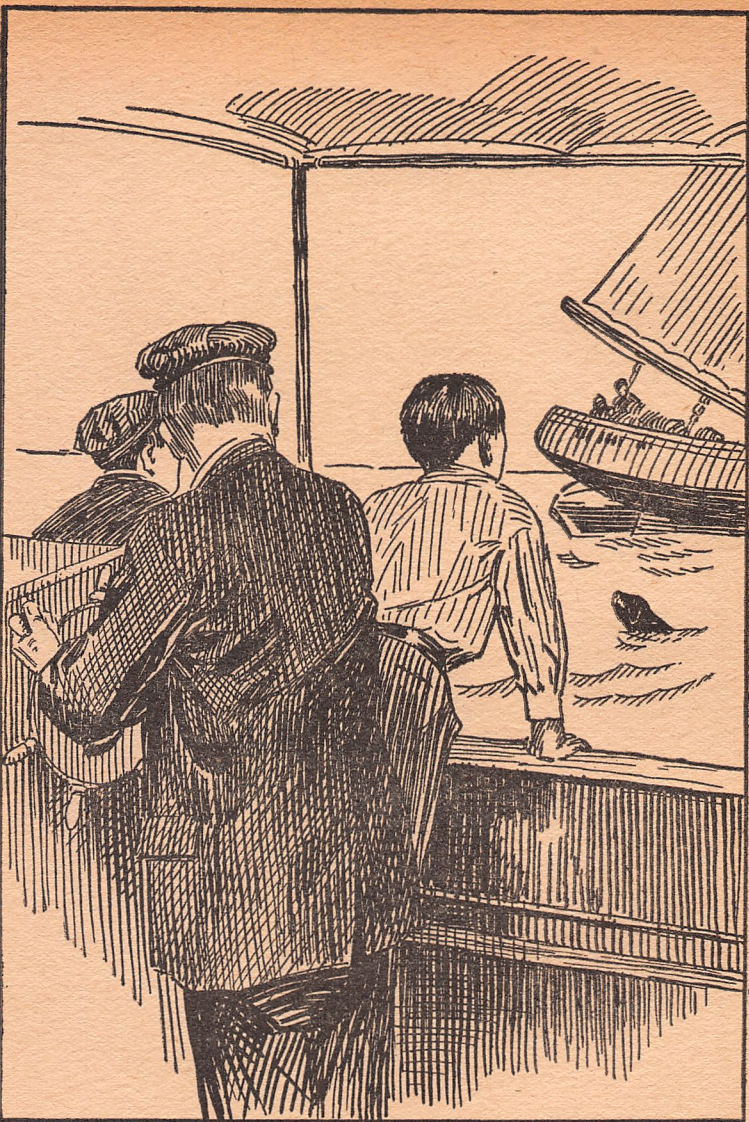
"Maybe you'd better take charge," suggested Chot. "These fellows won't get out of my course."

"Good reason! They have the right of way!" chuckled Rick. "Besides, they're out for business and we're out for pleasure."

"Yes, I'll take the wheel," said Uncle Tod.

He swung the *Sallie* well out of the way of an approaching, drifting clam schooner, but it was not easy, as there was a strong tide running.

The crew of the clam vessel were all busy



"In an instant the setter had leaped over the rail."

at the rakes, and paid little attention to the free course of their craft. The *Sallie* had swung far enough out to be safe from danger, but a moment later a smaller motor craft, coming out from behind an anchored barge, was right in the path of the rapidly drifting schooner.

"Look out!" cried Uncle Tod.

"Mind where you're going!" Rick warned.

"What's the matter with you?" angrily shouted the captain of the clammer.

Our friends could see but one man in the small motor boat, which was in great danger of being run down. But as the shouts of warning increased the two boys saw a little girl, with a mass of golden hair, come out of the small trunk cabin and join the man at the tiller.

The skipper of the small motor boat was evidently doing his best to avoid a collision, and he succeeded except for a narrow margin. This was enough to cause the drifting schooner to strike the motor craft a glancing blow. Slight as the crash was, however, it proved staggering to the lighter vessel, and as she heeled over Rick and Chot had a glimpse of "Goldilocks," as they mentally called the little

girl, shooting overboard and into the rain-pelted waters of the bay.

"Look!" cried Captain Tod. Rapidly he spun the wheel over to go to the rescue, but Rick was even quicker.

"Get her, Ruddy!" he cried to the dog.

In an instant the setter had leaped over the rail, and was swimming toward the little girl, whose yellow hair formed a golden halo about her head as she raised her hands and began to sink beneath the water.

CHAPTER VI

“HOKUM” DRISCOLL

FROM the small boat, overboard from which the little girl had been knocked by the collision with the schooner, there came a scream, and Rick and Chot, looking, saw a woman struggling with the man at the wheel.

“No! No, you shan’t go after her! I’ll go! Just a moment! Don’t jump!” cried the man. It was evident this woman was the girl’s mother. “I’ll save her!” he cried. “You stay on board!”

Overboard he went, and, at the same time one of the clammers from the schooner, stopping only long enough to shake off his rubber boots, also went over the rail in a graceful dive.

“I guess we can best help by staying right here on deck and getting as close up as we can,” said Captain Tod.

It was the wisest action, for there were enough in the water now to save Goldilocks, and some craft would need to be near at hand

when she was rescued. The schooner and the small motor boat had drifted apart; the engine of the craft, with the screaming woman on board, having been shut down, evidently by the man, before he leaped.

Following out his idea, Uncle Tod put the *Sallie* around in a sharp turn, and all eyes were turned toward the two swimming men and the swimming dog. Of these Ruddy was nearest to where a patch of white showed all that was visible of the little girl.

An instant later Ruddy had reached this patch and, making a dive, he was seen to lift his head from the waves. He had something in his jaws, and he was paddling hard to keep himself as high up in the water as possible.

"He's got her!" cried Rick.

And, indeed Ruddy had Goldilocks.

Then, swimming hard, the two men reached the dog and the little girl about the same time. The *Sallie* was nearing the group in the water.

"Stand by to heave a line, Rick!" called Captain Tod at the wheel, and a little later Goldilocks was hauled up on the deck, half unconscious from her sudden immersion, but otherwise in no danger. The water was soon

drained from her mouth and throat and with a gasp she opened her eyes.

"Oh, Daddy!" she sobbed, nestling to her father.

"You're all right, Pet!" he soothed.

"Sure you're all right," added the man from the clam schooner, for he, too, with Ruddy, had climbed dripping to the after deck of the *Sallie*. "Here—take this!" and rather awkwardly he held out an object which he took from his pocket.

This object proved to be a huge clam, or, rather, three clams growing together, much as oysters grow, but this was rather an odder freak, since it is natural for oysters to cluster together, but seldom clams.

"Where did you get that?" cried the father of the rescued girl, and he sat up suddenly, taking the triple clam from the wet hand of the other man. "Where'd you get it?" and his voice showed unusual eagerness.

"Why, it came up in my rake this morning," was the answer. "First one I ever see. I was sorter givin' it to your little gal, 'count of her bein' scared."

"Thanks! I'll keep it for her. You are sure you don't want it?"

"Course not! It's odd enough—I never see one afore, but I don't bother with such things. I stuck it in my pocket jest afore we bumped into you, or you into us—I don't know which it was."

"Sort of six of one and half a dozen of the other," remarked Uncle Tod. "But that lady over on your boat seems anxious to talk to you," he went on, as cries came from the smaller motor craft.

"Oh, tell mother I'm all right, Daddy!" begged Goldilocks, or "Pet" as her father had called her.

"We'll be there in a minute!" he shouted across the open stretch of water. "You're sure this isn't a fake?" he asked, as he looked at the triple clam.

"A *fake*? Why of course not! Who'd want to fake anything that grew natural?" asked the clam digger.

"Lots more than you think would," was the somewhat odd answer. "I'm much obliged to you for it—for Pet, that is. I sort of collect such things."

"You're welcome to it, Mr.—er—"

He paused suggestively.

"Driscoll is my name. Hank Driscoll, though I'm called 'Hokum' Driscoll by my friends, and I'll count you all in," and he looked around on the circle that surrounded him and his sunny-haired daughter.

"Mine's Parson. I'm mate of that schooner," and the clam digger indicated the vessel from which he had leaped.

Captain Tod completed the introductions by presenting himself and the boys, and then suggested that if he left Mate Parson aboard his vessel, and took Mr. Driscoll and Mary—which the boys learned was her right name—to their craft, Mrs. Driscoll's mind would be easier.

"Yes, it was all I could do to stop her from jumping overboard," said Hokum Driscoll. "I knew there wasn't any need of that, with all this help so near at hand—especially your dog," and he looked at Captain Tod.

"'Tisn't mine—it's my nephew's," said the skipper of the *Sallie*. "Yes, Ruddy surely was on the job, as the boys say."

"Good old dog!" murmured Hokum Driscoll, patting Ruddy's head, an attention which Rick's pet seemed to enjoy. "Well, Pet," her

father said to her, "are you all right now? Shall we go back to mother?"

"Yes," she answered weakly, for she had been through a trying experience.

The mate having been put aboard the clam schooner, where the crew expressed regret at the accident (though it was not altogether their fault) the *Sallie* was put about and headed for the smaller motor boat, where Mary's mother anxiously waited.

"Will you come on board?" asked Mr. Driscoll, as he and Mary were about to leave the *Sallie*.

"Please come!" begged Mrs. Driscoll. "I want to thank you all for saving Pet—especially that splendid dog!" and her eyes filled with tears as she clasped her daughter to her, and reached out with one hand to pet Ruddy who, looking toward Rick for permission, had leaped aboard the smaller craft, which was named, in honor of the sunny-haired girl—*Pet*.

"Here's something to help the show along, Mother!" said Mr. Driscoll to his wife, as he pulled out the big triple clam and put it on a locker seat.

"Oh, you and your show!" laughed his wife.

Mary then went into the cabin to put on dry clothes, seeming little the worse for her accident.

"It will be a regular show when I get it started!" declared Mr. Driscoll. "If I only had a two headed alligator—"

"A two headed alligator!" exclaimed Rick and Chot in concert.

"I see that my husband hasn't told you what business he is in," said Mrs. Driscoll. "Though you might guess, when he collects such specimens as that," and she pointed to the odd clam.

"I'm in the show business," said Mr. Driscoll himself. "I thought I had told you, but perhaps I didn't. I used to be with a circus, and help run the side-shows," he went on. "I know how eager people are to look at something freakish and strange, so for some years I have run shows of that kind. I sold my last one, and I'm getting such things together for another. But it's slow work. Freaks are getting scarce, or else they cost so much you can't make any money.

"Having nothing special to do I'm cruising around, and whenever I hear of any freak I

try to get it. I have one or two, but this clam was a regular find—didn't cost me a cent, either!" and Mr. Driscoll seemed much pleased.

"Have you got 'em on board?" Chot wanted to know.

"Got what?"

"Your freaks," Rick said as he began to look interested. The chance to see part of a side-show at close quarters and free, was not to be lightly passed over.

"Got 'em here? Gracious, no!" laughed Hokum Driscoll. "One's a big snake with a double tail, and the other is a monkey with red hair. I have them on shore. But they aren't enough to start a show."

"A monkey with red hair?" exclaimed Uncle Tod. "That interests me. I know something of monkeys. I've been in South America and I never saw a monkey with red hair, though there are lots with brown fur that's almost red."

"To tell you the truth," admitted Hokum Driscoll in a low voice, "I don't dare let this monkey get out in the rain. I'm afraid—I'm very much afraid that his hair is dyed red, and I'm not prying too closely into it. I bought him in good faith, though, as the only red haired

monkey in captivity, and I'll so exhibit him. But I've got to pick up a lot more freaks before I can give a show. This clam is good, but I wish it was five times as big. The public wants things it can see easily—that's why I'd like a two headed alligator!" he ended with a laugh.

"Well, if we come across one in our travels we'll send you word," promised Rick.

"I wish you would!" said Hokum Driscoll eagerly. "Here, this address will reach me," and he gave Rick a card. "Any sort of a freak will do—you boys know what I want. It doesn't have to be an alligator with two heads. A dog or cat doubled the same way, would be a great find."

"Oh, Henry! Don't bother these good friends with such nonsense!" urged Mrs. Driscoll.

"'Tisn't nonsense!" declared her husband. "I'm in the show business. It's a good honest business and I don't advertise what I can't perform. I play fair—except maybe in the matter of that red haired monkey," he added as an afterthought. "And I'm not asking too many questions about him. If there's any cheating

in that I'm as badly cheated as the next one, so that's fair.

"But if you should hear of anything—you're making quite a long cruise," he went on, "just get word to me and I'll come as quickly as I can and try to secure the freak. I'd like to start the show this summer. It's the only kind of business I know anything about—that and running a motor boat. I'm not ashamed of it for people have to be amused as well as instructed. I can't do the latter, so I'll have to stick to the former, and I'll do it honestly!"

In spite of the showman's rather rough manners and boasting ways, Uncle Tod and the boys formed a liking for Hokum Driscoll. Whatever else he was, he was honest, though his ambitions may not have been of the highest order. But, after all, isn't it better to give a clean, honest side-show than to be in some other, less honest but so-called more "respectable" business?

"Well, we must be going," said Uncle Tod, as they started toward the *Sallie*, which had been made fast to the anchored *Pet*.

"And don't forget my freaks!" urged Mr. Driscoll.

"We'll be on the lookout," promised Rick.
 "Come on, Ruddy."

The setter seemed to have made such friends with Mary that he did not care to leave her. But Ruddy was too well trained to need more than two calls to join his master. So, with a final wave of his tail, while Mary gave him a last caress, the dog followed the two boys and Uncle Tod on board the *Sallie*.

The line was cast off, and with expressions of hope that all would meet again, the two parties went their separate ways.

The rain kept up, but neither Rick nor Chot minded this. As for Ruddy, all weather seemed the same to him, as long as he was with Rick. Captain Tod was busy in the cabin, over some papers all the rest of the day, leaving the navigation of the boat to the boys—except in some situation where careful steering was needed.

"I guess it's going to clear," said Chot toward evening, when they were approaching a small town, where they proposed to tie up for the night.

"I hope so," echoed Rick. "Maybe you'd better see if that forward line is clear."

Chot made his way toward the bow with this

end in view, and as he passed one of the cabin ports, where he could look in and see Uncle Tod, the boy came to a sudden stop, and gazed intently in through the glass.

“What’s the matter?” asked Rick, struck by something odd in Chot’s attitude.

“Come and look at your uncle,” advised Chot in a low voice.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT BLAZE

RICK, who was at the wheel, throttled down the motor to its slowest speed. There was a control lever beside the steering apparatus by which this could be done. Then, as the *Sallie* could safely be left to her own guidance for a minute or two, since no other craft was within sight, Rick was able to leave his post.

"What's the matter?" he asked Chot, as he crept forward along the rail. There was space enough between the side of the trunk cabin and the rail of the boat, for a person to pass on either side.

"He's acting funny," was Chot's comment.

The boys talked in whispers, and as Rick advanced he made as little noise as possible.

Standing beside his chum, who was gazing in through one of the cabin ports, Rick beheld a sight which caused him astonishment at the time, and anxiety later. For he saw his uncle, seated at the small table in the cabin, looking

at what seemed to be pieces of stone that glittered brightly even in the dim light of the late afternoon with the storm clouds just clearing.

And, as the boys looked, Uncle Tod raised one of the pieces of rock to his mouth, seemed to taste it and then, placing it back on the table, he laughed heartily. It was such an odd time for mirth, and such a strange thing to laugh at—merely some pieces of rock—that the boys gazed at one another in astonishment.

“What do you make of that?” asked Chot.

“I don’t know,” Rick had to admit. “He seems mighty pleased over what he has there.”

“I should say so! Say, I know what it is!”

“What?”

“Gold!”

“Gold?” asked Rick in a whisper. “How could it be gold?”

“Well, I think your uncle has discovered a gold mine somewhere, and he’s bought this boat and is going back to the mine to get out the gold ore. That’s what he’s looking at now—gold ore!”

Rick was going to declare that such an idea was all nonsense—that there was no gold, and never had been, in that part of the country

where his uncle had his camp on Long River. But as Rick was going to make his statement the rays of the setting sun struck in through a port hole on the opposite side of the cabin. And the rays, falling full on one of the pieces of rock, made it glitter as though it were studded with diamonds.

"Look at that!" hoarsely whispered Chot.

Rick was about to reply, when Uncle Tod suddenly arose and, with a quick motion of his hand, swept into a strong wooden box the pieces of glittering rock that had been spread on the table in front of him.

Seeing the skipper thus preparing to come out on deck, the two boys quickly and silently separated, Chot going forward to see that the bow line was in readiness for making fast, and Rick to take the wheel again.

Uncle Tod came up out of the little companionway. His face showed none of the mirth and pleased satisfaction that had lighted it as he gazed at the rocks when he thought himself unobserved. But he was his usual jolly self as he spoke to Rick, saying:

"We'd better get ready to land. I felt you

slow up. Did you see a good place to tie to for the night?"

"There's a dock over there," and Rick indicated one they were approaching. This was not exactly an answer to the skipper's question, but the boy was too excited over what he had seen to know just what to say.

"That's a private dock," observed Uncle Tod. "We'd have to hunt up the owner and get permission to tie to it. Better go a little farther up stream. I think there's a public dock there. Or, if we like, we can anchor out in mid channel. There's the dinghy in case we want to go ashore," and he indicated a small rowboat towed astern of the *Sallie*.

"Let's anchor out," suggested Rick. "Then we won't have to be always worrying about somebody coming aboard in the night—some thief I mean."

"Yes, it will save worrying," agreed the captain. "All right, pick out a good place and drop the anchor."

The *Sallie* chugged her way on up the winding stream until, as a bend was rounded, there came into view a little village, the white spired church standing out wondrously beautiful in

the last rays of the setting sun, which finally succeeded in breaking through the storm clouds as the day ended.

"That's a good place to stop," commented Uncle Tod. "And I can go ashore and mail a letter. Do you boys want to get supper while I'm gone?" he suggested.

"I will!" offered Chot. "It's my turn, anyhow."

"That means it's my turn at the dishes afterward!" laughed Rick. "Go ahead, Uncle Tod! We'll have grub ready when you get back."

The old sailor went below, while Rick and Chot looked at one another. The same idea was in the minds of both lads. Did the captain's proposed visit ashore have to do with gold—diamonds—at any rate the sparkling rocks over which he had laughed so silently and secretly? That was something the boys would have given much to know.

If Uncle Tod went below to write a letter it was a very short one, for he came up on deck in a few minutes, with no missive visible, and started astern where the painter of the little towed dinghy was made fast.

Uncle Tod pulled the small boat close enough

so that he could drop into it and cast off while the *Sallie* was yet moving, at the same time calling to the boys:

"Drop anchor off the town, and I'll row up there after I go to the post office. I want a bit of a walk and a pull at the oars."

"I should say he did," commented Rick, when his uncle was out of hearing distance. "He might have waited until we got up closer to the village. He'd have saved himself a mile row."

"And a bit of a walk, too," observed Chot. "But then, as he says he may want exercise."

For Uncle Tod had left the motor boat some distance below the village, acting on a sudden impulse it would seem.

To the credit of Rick and Chot be it said that neither proposed a visit to the cabin, to see if they could get a glimpse of those sparkling rocks the captain had been looking at. Though I need not have told you this since I have already informed you that Chot and Rick were Boy Scouts.

"Well, it's his own affair," said Rick, as he and his chum prepared to drop the anchor overboard. "He never said anything at our house about having a gold mine."

"How about diamonds?" asked Chot eagerly.

"Hu! Diamonds!" scoffed Rick. "The only place you can get diamonds is in South Africa!"

"Or Brazil," suggested the other lad.

"That's right!" suddenly exclaimed Rick. "Uncle Tod *has* been to South America! I forgot about that! Well, whatever he has is his, I guess. When he wants us to know he'll tell us. Now what are we going to have for grub? I'm getting hungry!"

"I'm not getting—I am!" laughed Chot. "What place is this?" and he indicated the village which straggled itself along one side of the stream in which they were anchored.

"I don't know," Rick answered. "Uncle Tod may tell us when he gets back."

The supper was on the table, and Chot was ready to cook the meat as soon as the dinghy should be seen approaching, a sight for which both boys looked momentarily.

Soon the skipper was observed to be putting out from one of the two docks along the village shore, for he had rowed up to this point before landing.

"Start things going," advised Rick. "He'll be here in about five minutes."

"Grub ready?" asked the skipper with a laugh, as he climbed up on deck in less than the time indicated.

"Just waiting for you," answered Rick. "What place is this?"

"Town of Waterford. Not much of a place. I think we'd better anchor a bit higher up after supper, boys."

"Why?" asked Chot, sticking his head out of the galley port for a breath of fresh air.

"Well I heard, up at the post office, that a gang of hoodlums have been making free with boats around here lately, and we don't want any trouble. It's just as easy to go up about half a mile. I don't believe they'll bother us then."

Accordingly, after the meal, when Uncle Tod had insisted on helping Rick do the dishes, the anchor was pulled up and they cruised slowly to a less public part of the stream.

"You boys can go ashore and stretch your legs if you like," said Uncle Tod when, in the afterglow of the evening, he sat on deck peace-

fully smoking his pipe. "You'll sleep better for a trip ashore."

"Yes, I guess so," agreed Rick, and with Ruddy accompanying them they rowed to land. They walked down to the village, to get some ice cream sodas, a luxury they had been denied since beginning the cruise, and Ruddy seemed glad of the change from the *Sallie*, for it gave him a chance for much-needed exercise.

Rick and Chot also took advantage of the opportunity to send home some souvenir postals, mailing them at the post office. The cards told the folks that all was well with the voyagers.

"Did you mention anything about the—the glittering rocks?" asked Rick of his chum.

"No. Did you want me to?"

"No. We'd better find out more about them before we say anything."

"That's what I think," agreed Chot.

It was dark when they reached the *Sallie*, and Captain Tod had the deck and cabin lights glowing.

"Well, boys, it's 9 o'clock and I'm going to turn in," he said, "you can come when you get

ready. We don't need to set any watch I think. We're safe enough here."

So the boys thought. It was quiet and calm where they were anchored and as there was little to do, save talk, Chot and Rick soon exhausted this amusement and turned in.

In the middle of the night Rick was awakened by feeling some one pulling at the light bed clothes that covered him in his bunk. At first he had a sort of dream that he was in camp, sleeping with Chot, and that his chum was trying to get more than his share of the blanket.

"Quit! Go on away!" muttered Rick, sleepily.

The pulling continued, however, and then Rick heard Ruddy give a low bark. Instantly the boy was awake.

"What's the matter, Ruddy?" he asked. The dog barked again—not loudly, and taking hold of the coat of Rick's pajamas began pulling on it.

"Oh, you want me to come out on deck! Something wrong!" said the boy, the sleep rapidly clearing from his brain.

He glanced quickly about the cabin, which

was dimly lighted. Neither his uncle nor Chot had stirred, nor had they been alarmed.

"All right, Ruddy! I'm coming!" whispered Rick. He wondered if it could be thieves? But he dismissed this idea almost as soon as it occurred to him. For if it had been some midnight visitor Ruddy would not have barked in such low tones. Clearly this was something that the dog, intelligent as he was, could not understand.

And it needed but a glance from the deck of the *Sallie*, when Rick reached that vantage point, to show the cause of the dog's alarm. For in the western sky there was a red and flickering blaze, which, Rick could see, came from the roof of a small house, not far from the water's edge. It was burning.

"Fire! Fire!" cried Rick, and to this alarm Ruddy added his loudest barks.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOUR LEGGED HEN

NEITHER Uncle Tod nor Chot were such sound sleepers that it needed more than two calls on the part of Rick, and a few of Ruddy's barks, to awaken them. Up on deck they came running, nor did they need to ask the cause of the alarm.

For the fire was burning more briskly now, illuminating the water between the *Sallie* and the shore. There were no other boats near by, and as yet no one on land seemed to have paid any attention to the fire.

"Come on, boys!" cried Uncle Tod, as he hurried down into the cabin again to put on a few clothes. "We've got to do our part! The family in that house doesn't seem to know their place is on fire! Lively now!"

Rick and Chot needed no such advice as this. They were dressed—that is with what few clothes were needed on such a hot night—before the skipper again appeared on deck.

"I'll get in the dinghy!" cried Rick.

"Hold it for me!" begged the captain.

"Don't go without me!"

"We won't!" promised Chot. "Down, Ruddy!" he commanded, for the setter was leaping about, barking his loudest and much excited.

And now some dogs on shore, aroused either by the glare of the fire or by Ruddy's alarm, added their barks to his, and it would seem that some inmates of the burning house must be aroused. There were no neighbors living very near, or some of them might have called out a warning had they seen the fire.

"What can we do to put it out?" asked Rick, when he and his uncle and chum were rowing toward the shore as fast as they could go.

"Have to form a bucket brigade," answered Uncle Tod. "That is unless some one has a force pump. But we ought to have help. We three can't do much to fight the fire, though we can help the family to get out and save some of their belongings."

"A fire in the country is a bad thing," observed Chot. "There aren't any fire engines."

"A fire's a bad thing at any time and any

place," said the skipper, as he swayed at the oars, for he had assumed the duty of getting the small boat to shore. Ruddy was perched at the bow, doing his full duty as he understood it—which was to keep up a continual barking.

And either his alarm, the barking of other dogs or the light in the sky had, by this time, roused some men living at a little distance and on either side of the burning house. For now dim figures could be seen running across the fields toward the blaze.

Captain Tod landed with the two boys and Ruddy. The small boat was made fast to a post in the bank and they started on a run toward the fire.

"Will it be safe to leave the *Sallie* all alone?" asked Rick, as he hurried along at his uncle's side.

"Why not? She won't pull up anchor and leave; will she?"

"No, but somebody might board her and take—" Rick was going to say "your gold or diamonds" but he thought better of it, and he changed it to—"they might take our things."

"Oh, I don't believe they will," said Captain

Tod. "And, anyhow, there isn't so much that's worth taking, considering the risk. My money is well hidden. I don't believe even Ruddy could find it. Now we must get busy at the fire."

By this time the three had reached the burning house, getting there at the same time that a number of neighbors arrived. There were several other dogs besides Ruddy, and, after rubbing noses and otherwise getting acquainted, they contented themselves with barking and getting under the feet and in the way of the hurrying, excited men.

"Where's a pump?"

"Where's some water?"

"Get the pails!"

"We've got to start a bucket brigade!"

These were only a few of the excited cries that, added to the crackle of the blaze, made a riot in the night. Some men who evidently were acquainted with the premises, found a few pails, and two stationed themselves at an iron pump connected with the well.

"Somebody's got to carry things out!" cried a man whose chin whiskers wobbled curiously up and down when he talked.

"And rouse up Jim and his folks!" added another man, "Jim" evidently being the head of the house that was on fire.

However there was no need to do this, for now some heads began to appear at upper windows of the blazing dwelling, and a woman's voice asked:

"What's the matter down there?"

"Your house is on fire!" cried half a dozen in a chorus.

"My land sakes!" the woman cried. "Did you hear that, Jim! The house is on fire! Get up!"

Another woman screamed, a man's shout was heard from within the house and then the operations of rescue, of salvaging the furniture and of putting out the fire all began at once.

In fact there was little in the way of personal rescue to do, for the family, once they understood what the excitement was about, hurried down, half dressed, and ran outside. Then they began carrying things out, with the usual curious happening of some one throwing the clock out of the window, and carefully carrying down a feather pillow from a bed.

A ladder was brought, placed against the

burning side of the house and pails of water passed up to be dashed over the roof. Fortunately the fire had started on a low extension of the dwelling, and in a part where no one slept. So the blaze was easier to fight than otherwise would have been the case. The men worked eagerly and rapidly, swiftly passing the water pails from the well until a small force pump was put into operation.

All this with a result that, much sooner than would have seemed possible, the fire was out and the house was not badly damaged. The neighbors helped carry back the furniture that had been taken out in such a rush, Chot and his friends doing their share, and Ruddy barking as usual. The clock was a wreck.

Suddenly one of the girls of the household—there were two girls and two small boys—cried:

“The chicken coop is on fire! We’ve got to save Esmerelda!”

Some sparks, falling on the hen house, had started a small blaze there, it being unnoticed until now.

“We’ll soon have that out,” said the man with the wobbling chin whiskers as he started on a run with a pail of water. But Ruddy, not

exercising his usual good sense, got in front of the man, tangled himself up in the fireman's legs and the pail-carrier went down, splashing the water all over the setter. Not that it mattered much, for Ruddy loved water in the summer. But it spoiled the intention of the bewhiskered fire-fighter.

"Oh, Esmerelda will burn!" cried one of the girls. "We must save her!"

"Is one of your sisters out there—in the hen coop?" asked Rick.

"No, Esmerelda is a chicken—a four legged chicken! Oh, come on, Alice!" she cried.

"We must save Esmerelda!"

CHAPTER IX

RICK IS WORRIED

RICK and Chot, standing beside the girl who had spoken of the four legged hen while nearly every one else hurried with water to put out the blaze on the chicken coop, hardly knew whether she was joking or not. But the girl seemed serious.

"Oh, Alice!" she cried again, beckoning to her older sister, who had just picked up the ruins of the clock, smashed by being thrown from the window. "Oh, Alice, we've got to save Esmerelda!"

"Is there really a four legged hen out there?" asked Rick. He saw that the blaze at the coop would soon be out, with little danger to the hen house.

"Of course there is!" said the girl who had given the alarm. "If she isn't burned I'll show her to you!"

"Guess there isn't much burned out at the chicken coop," observed Chot. "They got the

fire out pretty quickly even if Ruddy did upset one man with a pail of water," he chuckled. The chin-whiskered fire-fighter had not suffered much from his tumble, and the kick he aimed at Ruddy, while it did not reach the dog (as perhaps the man never intended it should) had brought Rick's pet back to his senses, and he was more quiet, not getting in the way any more.

"Come on, Jennie!" suggested the girl addressed as Alice. "Let's see if Esmerelda's all right."

"How'd she come to have four legs?" asked Rick, as he and Chot followed the two girls. There were enough neighbors on hand now to help get the furniture back in the house, and as the main part of the dwelling was not damaged the family was not homeless.

"I don't know," answered Jennie. "This one chicken came out of the shell with four legs. We didn't think she'd live, but she did, and now she's almost a year old. She's a great curiosity, as well as a pet and we like her. I hope she isn't burned."

"Oh, I guess she'll be all right," said Rick. "Here, we'll take one of these lanterns, and go see about Esmerelda."

When the light of the fire died down the place was in darkness until several neighbors brought over lanterns, and one of these was now pressed into service to inspect the chicken house.

"There she is—and she's all right!" cried Jennie, when the door had been opened, and the lantern flashed inside, revealing a number of hens and roosters, much puzzled and alarmed, perched on their roosts.

"I'll get her," offered Alice, going in.

There were a few frightened crows from the roosters, some cluckings and cacklings from the hens and a fluttering on the part of Esmerelda as Alice picked up the freak chicken. And as the girl brought Esmerelda out where the light from the lantern fell on her, Rick and Chot could see that the fowl had four perfect legs, where, in the ordinary course of nature, but two should have grown. The two extra legs were small, but otherwise just like the others, and they stuck out a little above the one on which Esmerelda had been perched.

"Say, she sure is a curiosity!" exclaimed Chot.

"I should say so!" agreed Rick. "Does she

scratch with all four legs?" he asked the girls. "If she does she must get twice as much to eat as the other hens."

"No, she seems to use only the two larger legs," Alice stated. But she's strong and healthy and we like her. I'm so glad she wasn't burned."

"None of the chickens were," observed Jennie. "The fire didn't get inside. You men and boys worked too fast!" she added with a grateful smile. "But where do you live around here?" she asked, as she looked more closely at Rick and Chot, and glanced down at Ruddy who had now joined his young master. "Have you just moved here?" she inquired.

"No, we don't live around here," Rick answered. "We're cruising with my uncle. Our boat is out in the river. My dog saw your house on fire. I guess he saw it first, for he got me up and when I yelled I didn't see anybody around."

"Then I guess we have you and your dog to thank for not letting our house get burned worse," remarked Alice. "We never knew a thing until mother heard the excitement outside and called father."

"Well, I'm glad Ruddy got me up," said Rick. "And now I guess we'd better be going back. There doesn't seem much more we can do."

"No, thank you, I guess our neighbors will give us all the help we need," said Jennie, as she softly stroked the feathers of the four legged hen.

"Would you sell her?" asked Chot, who had been letting his chum do most of the talking up to now.

"Sell who?" Alice wanted to know.

"That four legged chicken," Chot replied, and when Rick looked curiously at him Chot added: "Mr. Driscoll would pay a good sum for a freak like that."

"You're right!" exclaimed Rick. "I forgot about him. Maybe he would buy your four legged chicken," he went on.

"Who?" asked Jennie.

"Mr. Driscoll—'Hokum' Driscoll he calls himself. He used to have a circus side-show, and he's getting up another exhibition. We met him when his daughter fell overboard. He has a triple clam and he'd like to get a two headed alligator, or a cow or something like

that. He'd buy your four legged hen!" ended Rick eagerly.

"Do you think he would?" asked Jennie, who seemed to be the one in charge of the curiosity. "I often thought maybe I could sell her and get some money. She's my chicken," she went on. "Alice and I take turns in having those that hatch out, and Esmerelda is mine. I like her, but we'll need some money, after this fire," she said, a bit sadly.

"I'm sure Mr. Driscoll would buy this fowl," said Rick. "Wait, I'll ask my uncle what he thinks he'd give."

At that moment Captain Tod came up, searching for the boys to get them to go back to the *Sallie*, since there was nothing more they could do on shore. He was shown the four legged chicken.

"That is just the sort of freak Driscoll would want," said the skipper. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he went on, after a moment of thought. "It may be worth more, or it may be worth less to him, but I'll buy that fowl from you for twenty-five dollars and if Driscoll gives me more I'll send the money to you. How's that?"

"Oh, I never thought Esmerelda would be worth all *that!*" exclaimed Jennie in an awed voice. "Did you, Alice? Twenty-five dollars! What a lot of money! But are you sure Mr. Driscoll would pay you that much for her?" she asked, doubtfully."

"I'll take a chance," said Captain Tod. "And if he gives me any more it will come to you. I should judge the average price of freak four legged chickens would be about twenty-five dollars. If it was a two headed alligator now—well, of course it would come a good deal higher. But will you sell Esmerelda for twenty-five?"

"I'll ask mother," said Jennie, as she ran off with the odd hen under her arm.

Mrs. Murdock—which was the name of the family whose house had been burning—evidently thought twenty-five dollars a fair price, and Jennie received permission to sell. Esmerelda was placed in a crate and carried by Chot and Rick on their way back to the dinghy, Ruddy trotting along beside them, sniffing now and then at the queer hen.

Inquiry by Captain Tod brought the information that the neighbors of the Murdocks

would do all that needed to be done now, and, not having learned how the fire started—for there seemed to be no information on this point—the voyagers rowed back to the *Sallie*, another member of the crew, Esmerelda, having been added to the mess.

In spite of Rick's alarm that thieves might have boarded the motor boat while they were on shore fighting the fire, nothing appeared to have been disturbed, and the travelers were soon resuming their interrupted sleep.

The next morning saw them on their way again, and as they left the vicinity of the partly burned house Rick and Chot saw the two girls waving aprons at them from shore.

"I wonder if they're saying good-bye to us or Esmerelda?" laughed Chot.

"To all of us, I reckon," said Rick. "But say, Uncle Tod," he went on, "how are you going to get this four legged chicken to Mr. Driscoll?"

"Oh, I'll drop him a line—I have his address—and if he wants it I can mail the freak hen to him parcel post. You can send almost anything by parcel post these days."

"Supposing he doesn't want it?" asked Chot.

"Well, I think he will. But if he doesn't I'll keep it myself. I like animals, and maybe I'll start a little side-show of my own. How would you like that, Rick?" he asked with a laugh.

"Well, it would be fun for a while, but this cruising life suits me," said the boy.

"Same here!" murmured Chot. "But if we should want to start a show we have the beginning—a dandy dog and a four legged hen."

The fowl was placed in an improvised coop on deck, and going ashore at the next town, Captain Tod bought some grain for her. He also sent a letter to Mr. Driscoll, telling him about the freak.

For two days the *Sallie* cruised on up a broad river that connected with the bay on which Belemere was partly located. The destination of the voyagers was still many miles away, and the distance was not any too far for the boys.

Indeed they so enjoyed the days on board the motor boat with Ruddy, Esmerelda and Captain Tod, that they would have been glad to

do nothing else all summer but voyage in this fashion. As for the skipper he seemed to have no particular object in view, and was in no haste to get to Long River and his camp on shore.

This lack of some definite object on the part of his uncle was somewhat of a puzzle to Rick. He thought a man as efficient as Mr. Toddingham Belmont must have been, in order to get money enough to buy a motor boat and own a camp, ought to have more energy than was shown by the skipper.

But the lazy, summer days appeared just to suit Uncle Tod, and he never seemed to be in any particular hurry. In spite of their firm determination not to pry into what did not concern them, Chot and Rick could not help wondering what was the nature of the sparkling rocks they had seen the skipper looking at. But he never referred to them, though he did hint at some "big" thing that was going to happen when he reached his camp on Long River.

"Rick," spoke Chot one day, when Uncle Tod had gone ashore, leaving the two boys in charge of the boat, "don't you think your uncle is a

bit more queer than when we first started?"

"How do you mean?" asked Rick.
"Queer?"

"Well, he talks to himself more than he did. And once I heard him saying 'crazy is as crazy does.' He said it more than once."

"He did?"

"Sure he did! Didn't you ever hear him say that?"

"Yes, that's one of the first things I ever heard him say," Rick answered, recalling the strange meeting in the woods. "That is since I met him this time."

"What do you reckon he means, Rick?"

"I don't know. I guess he's just odd, that's all."

Rick tried to get this out of his mind, but a question his uncle asked him that evening, when Chot had rowed ashore to get some bread that had been forgotten, gave the nephew something to worry about. For, sitting out on the deck in the pleasant evening, Captain suddenly inquired:

"Do you think I'm crazy, Rick?"

The question was shot out so abruptly, and with such lack of connection with the previous

talk, that Rick was at a loss for an answer. He did, however, manage to murmur:

"Why—no, Uncle Tod."

"Hum! Well, if I should start doing queer things—such as throwing Esmerelda overboard, or ramming the *Sallie's* nose into a mud bank—what would you think then?"

"Well, I reckon you'd have a reason for what you did."

"Good, Rick! That's a fine answer. And I would have a reason!" exclaimed the skipper, so earnestly that Rick knew he was not joking. "I would have a reason! Crazy is as crazy does! I'd have a *reason* all right—and a good one. But here comes Chot. Don't say anything to him about it—no matter what I do."

Before Rick could promise, Chot came rowing up with the bread. But though he kept silent, when he turned in that night Rick had a worried feeling that he might awaken to hear Esmerelda's frightened squawks as she struggled in the water, or feel the jar of the *Sallie* as she rammed the bank.

CHAPTER X

ARMORED CRUISERS

RICK'S fears, however, were unnecessary. Nothing unusual happened during the night, and when the morning sun roused them by shining in through the port holes they were also greeted by Ruddy's cheerful bark, and by the excited cackling of Esmerelda in her coop on deck.

"Ruddy, are you bothering that four legged freak?" cried Rick, as he hastily dressed. "Are you nipping Esmerelda?"

"Don't let anything like that happen!" shouted Captain Tod. "If Hokum Driscoll hears we let a four legged hen have two of her legs bitten off, he'll never forgive us. Hurry, Rick!"

Nothing like that was happening, however. Ruddy continued to bark, when Rick reached the deck, but it was only his way of exchanging compliments with a dog on shore.

Esmerelda, though, kept up her cackling, and

when Rick went close to her coop to investigate he gave a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter?" called Chot, who was struggling to get into his trousers.

"Esmerelda's laid an egg!" answered Rick.

"She has!" exclaimed Captain Tod. "Don't let it get broken whatever happens. We'll make an incubator and hatch out this egg. Maybe it will have a two headed chicken in it. Save that egg!"

Which Rick did, managing to get it out of the coop after some little trouble, for Esmerelda did not like being robbed, and she picked Rick severely trying to save her egg. But at last it was gotten out, and put in a secure place.

"I'll make an incubator sometime to-day," promised Captain Tod.

"How you going to do it?" Chot asked.

"Well you know all that makes eggs hatch is heat, say of about a hundred and one or a hundred and two degrees. When a hen begins to set nature starts a sort of fever in her blood to raise her temperature above normal. This heated condition lasts for three weeks or more, which is the time required for hatching chicken

eggs. Besides heat, though, some moisture is needed, and the hen supplies this by going off the nest now and then and getting her feathers damp.

“Now a incubator is nothing more than a big hen. The heat is supplied by a kerosene lamp, or even by electricity. The moisture is supplied by a pan of water kept in the incubator.”

“But suppose the lamp gets too hot, or goes out, and the eggs get too cold?” asked Rick.

“This sometimes happens,” answered Captain Tod. “And when it does the prospective chickens are either roasted to death or chilled so they don’t hatch out.

“This doesn’t happen if care is taken, however, or in good incubators, for they are controlled by a thermostat, which, as you boys probably know, is something to regulate the heat. In most incubators there is a combination of metals which easily expand, or swell up if they get too warm, and they shrink if they get too cold.

“These metals, in the form of a thermostat, are placed in the incubator, and there is an electrical device, worked by a battery that opens

or closes a damper in the egg-hatching machine. If the incubator heat goes over about one hundred and three or four degrees the sensitive metal expands, makes the electrical contact, a magnet pulls open the damper and lets out the too-hot air until the incubator cools down to the right temperature. Of course it may not work always, and that makes trouble."

"Do you think you can make an incubator?" asked Rick.

"I'm going to try," promised his uncle. "I'll go ashore at the first place I think likely will have what I want. But we'll wait until Esmerelda lays a few more eggs, for we might as well put half a dozen in to hatch as one—so much the more chance of getting freak chickens."

"Do you think you will?" Chot wanted to know.

"You never can tell," was the skipper's answer. "As a rule, though, one freak at a time is about all that ever happens. But we'll give Esmerelda's eggs a chance."

The boys were interested in the prospect of hatching chickens aboard the *Sallie*. There

was also much more to interest them, for they were journeying in a part of the country they had never before visited, cruising along a broad river which flowed from town to town and city to city.

Pleasant as the voyage was, though, Rick could not shake off a sense of worry about his uncle, and this worry was shared, in lesser degree, by Chot. True there had been no more of that strange talk—"crazy is as crazy does"—nor had the lads again seen the captain in the cabin gloating over glittering rocks.

Then Rick made up his mind to a line of action. Without telling his chum anything about it, and of course without mentioning it to the skipper, Rick wrote to his mother the chief events that had happened since leaving Belemere.

The boy told of his uncle's actions, from the time he had met him in the woods, and had first heard the "crazy" talk, and the burden of his letter was to this effect: Was there ever any suspicion that Uncle Tod was ever insane, was there any insanity in his family, and, in case there was, what should Rick do? He was not in the least afraid; he made this a strong

point, for Uncle Tod was so kind and gentle, that it could hardly be believed that he would turn violent. So Rick did not even suggest that his father come on to look into matters. Much less did he so much as hint that the cruise had better end as far as Rick and Ruddy were concerned. He and Chot would not dream of leaving—they were having too much fun.

So, having written his letter, giving it to Captain Tod to post, since the skipper was going ashore to buy material for the incubator, Rick felt more at ease.

“Do you think Mr. Driscoll will want Esmerelda soon?” he asked his uncle, as the skipper was rowing off. “She’s getting to be quite a pet, and she lays every other day.”

“We’ll keep her for a while, anyhow,” Captain Tod decided. “Even if Driscoll wants her for his collection of freaks he will hardly be able to get her inside of two weeks. I haven’t heard from him yet. I reckon he’s cruising as we are.”

Left to themselves on board the *Sallie*, the two boys and the dog, to say nothing of the four legged hen, prepared to enjoy the beautiful day. Captain Tod, who left just before

lunch, said he would not be back until nearly supper time.

"What do you say we go ashore?" asked Chot, when they had gotten a meal for themselves, and fed Ruddy and Esmerelda.

"Let's fish here on board for a while," suggested Rick. "We haven't caught anything worth cleaning lately, and this looks like a good place. Let's fish!"

"Suits me!" declared Chot.

The motor boat was tied up near the shore, in the bend of the river where big trees leaned over the water forming a pleasant shade. There was a sort of eddy there, and the deep pool, so calm and quiet, seemed to offer an ideal place for lurking fish.

The promise was borne out, too, for the boys had no sooner baited their hooks and cast in than they began to get nibbles. From nibbles to bites was but a short transition and Rick started the game going by hauling on deck a fine, flapping prize.

"Now it's your turn, Chot!" he cried, and Chot was not far in the rear of the race, landing a fish larger than his chum's.

It did not take long to catch as many fish as

could well be used, and as there was no sense in catching a larger number just to make a record, lines were put away and the boys then cleaned their catch, putting them in the ice box, for this luxury was aboard the *Sallie*.

"Now that we have something special for supper, let's go ashore and stretch our legs," proposed Chot again.

"We mustn't go too far away," Rick decided. "Uncle Tod might not like us to leave the boat alone, for this isn't night, and somebody might sneak on board and pick up anything lying around loose."

"I hope they don't take *Esmerelda*," laughed Chot.

"Same here. And they can't take Ruddy, for you couldn't get him to stay on board when we're on shore, unless you chained him."

As there was no intention of doing that, Ruddy was allowed to accompany the boys, much to his delight. A patch of woods adjoined that part of the river where the *Sallie* was made fast, and the two chums, with their dog, were soon roaming in the forest.

As usual Ruddy stirred up something that caused him to bark loudly. Hurrying up, to

see what it was, and prepared to warn his pet back in case he had discovered a skunk, Rick saw a sight which made him fairly yell out.

"Oh, what monsters!" he shouted. "Chot! Come here! Look! Did you ever see such big ones!"

"What are they—snakes?" cried Chot, crashing his way toward Rick and Ruddy.

"No, not snakes. Armored cruisers I reckon Uncle Tod would call them. Look! Aren't they whoppers! They'll do for Mr. Driscoll's freak show all right! If we can only get em!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BRASS BOUND BOX

CHOT was not yet near enough to get a view of what Ruddy had surprised in the under-brush—the objects that had caused Rick to exclaim so excitedly.

“What do you mean—armored cruisers?” asked Chot, as he broke through the last screen of underbrush between himself and his chum.

“Is there a gunboat out in the river?”

“No, this is on land!” laughed Rick. “But they’re as safe from harm as though they were gunboats. Look!”

He pointed to what Chot, at first, took to be a large stump, bristling with some black and white objects like pine needles. And then the “stump” seemed to move, as Ruddy nosed his way nearer it, and Rick called a warning to the dog.

“It’s alive!” cried Chot. “What is it?”

“Armored cruisers I tell you!” answered Rick. “Don’t touch ’em unless you want to

get a worse sore hand than the time you got caught on a fish hook."

"Why, there's two of 'em!" exclaimed Chot, as what he at first believed to be a bristling stump turned out to be two grotesque animals, with heavy, squatty bodies and short club-like tails. "Why, they're porcupines—hedgehogs!" he added.

"Porcupines, yes, but not hedgehogs," answered Rick. "There aren't any true hedgehogs in this country. They are mainly in England and Europe."

"I always thought hedgehogs and porcupines were the same," went on Chot.

"Well, they aren't," answered Rick. "Though the only reason I know is because I happened to read about them in a book one day after Ruddy chased a porcupine in our woods. But say these are monsters—the largest I ever saw."

"How'd you happen to spot 'em?" Chot wanted to know.

"Oh, they were cruising about and Ruddy nosed 'em out. He'd have nipped one if I hadn't stopped him."

"They'd 'a' shot their quills into him if he

had," observed Chot, as he continued to gaze at the two big porcupines which were coiled up into round, bristling balls near the stump, for which Rick's chum had at first taken them to be a part.

"That's another wrong idea," went on Rick. "Porcupines can't 'shoot' their quills."

"They can't!" cried Chot. "Sure they can!"

"No," Rick insisted. "But never mind about that now. The thing is can we get these two into a box, or something, and take 'em on board the *Sallie*. They'll do fine, with the four legged hen, to put in Mr. Driscoll's freak show. He'll pay us a good price for these armored cruisers, Chot."

"Will he? That'll be great! But what makes you call 'em armored cruisers?"

"Oh, well, a porcupine always sort of cruises along slow and easy like. He knows he can't run fast enough to get away, and all he can depend on are his spines, so he takes it easy. And they sure are *armored* if ever an animal was. Look at those quills, Chot!"

Indeed, rolled into balls as they were, the two unusually large porcupines presented nothing

but a sharp and bristling pointed surface on all sides. Their heads seemed to be among their four feet and their tails were coiled around them, though as Ruddy once approached too close the smaller of the two porcupines swung out the club-like tail viciously.

"There!" cried Rick. "That's one of the ways they defend themselves, with their tail. And the spines on that, as well as on the other parts of their body, are so loose in the skin that the stickers come out; and they're like Indian arrows for getting into a dog or any other animal. The quills have barbs on 'em like fish hooks."

"I always thought they could throw their quills—shoot 'em ten or fifteen feet," murmured Chot. "But, as you say, Rick, it would be a good thing if we could catch these fellows. Maybe we could get some money for 'em from Mr. Driscoll. But how?"

"Well," remarked Chot, "they are lazy sort of animals. They don't believe in hurrying. They're like skunks that way. These will stay around here for some time. We could go on board and get a box to keep 'em in."

"I'll tell you what we can do," put in Chot.

"You stay here with Ruddy and watch the porcupines. I'll go on board and look for a box. Though how we're going to get 'em in it I don't know."

"Oh, I guess we can poke 'em in with sticks without hurting 'em much," suggested Rick. "Go ahead and get the box. I'll stay here."

Off through the bushes crashed Chot again, after pausing to give another look at the two big porcupines, which still kept to their ball formation, presenting a bristling front, so to speak.

As Chot reached the *Sallie* he saw Uncle Tod returning from his journey to the village. The captain seemed to have completed his errands sooner than he had expected.

"Where's Rick?" he asked of Chot.

"Off in the woods. He's got two monster porcupines. We're going to sell 'em to Mr. Driscoll for his freak show. I came to get a box."

"Porcupines; eh?" exclaimed the skipper. "You want to be careful how you handle them. In fact you don't want to handle them at all. I guess I'd better go with you. We'll each take a box, these will do very well," and he

brought out some wooden ones that had held groceries and supplies.

Rick and Ruddy were still on guard when Chot and Captain Tod reached the lair of the porcupines in the woods, and neither rodent had moved much from the positions they took after the first alarm.

"Now wait a minute and I think we can get them into the boxes without exciting them too much," said Uncle Tod.

"How?" asked Rick.

"With salt. Porcupines are very fond of salt—more so than many other animals that care a lot for it. I brought some salt with me," the skipper said.

Taking some of the white crystals from his pocket, Uncle Tod sprinkled it on the ground near the porcupines, which were still coiled. In a moment or two, however, they thrust out their black noses and began licking up what to them was a great dainty.

"Now we'll make a thin trail of salt into each box," planned Captain Tod, "and we'll capture them without any trouble."

Each box was provided with a cover, and

when the cases had been set down, a little distance apart, with a trail of salt leading from the porcupines into each improvised trap, the two boys and the skipper drew back to await developments. Ruddy had by this time given up interest in the porcupines. Perhaps he may have slightly pricked his nose on some of their quills, though if he had pressed too hard against one it would have entered his skin, the barbed point, like that of a fish hook, preventing it coming out again. At any rate the dog lay down quietly, waiting Rick's pleasure.

As for the porcupines they showed much more interest in life since tasting the salt. They ate their way along the trail where the white particles were scattered on the leaves, and when they reached the boxes, where little mounds of salt were arranged they climbed in and kept on eating.

"Clap on the cover!" cried Captain Tod to Rick, suiting his own action to those words. In a moment the two big porcupines were caught.

"And they surely are big!" exclaimed the skipper, peering through the cracks. "I never saw any larger in this country, though in Africa

they grow much heavier, and some have quills, or spines, a foot long."

"How long are these?" asked Chot.

"Oh, about four inches, I should say. Here are some that dropped out," and he picked a few from the ground. "But don't try to stick yourselves with them," warned Uncle Tod. "They're as bad as fish hooks!"

"Funny thing they can't shoot 'em," observed Chot, as they started back toward the *Sallie*, carrying the boxes. "I always thought they could."

"Many persons do," said Captain Tod. "And more persons wrongly call these animals hedgehogs. A hedgehog, while it has spines, something like those of a porcupine, is quite a different animal. A hedgehog eats worms and grubs, and a porcupine lives almost entirely on roots, bark and berries. I won't say they wouldn't eat flesh if driven to it by hunger, but they are rodents, like rats and mice, and not flesh-eaters. These are two of the finest specimens I have ever seen in this country. Driscoll ought to be glad to get them."

"They won't stand for much petting," said Rick with a chuckle.

"No, indeed," agreed his uncle. "While sometimes the mountain-lion, lynx and the fisher or pekan kill and eat porcupines, and though even an eagle or the great horned owl has been known to get away with these spiny rodents, still it is the exception rather than the rule. And I have seen mountain-lions that have died from attacking porcupines."

"How?" asked both boys at once.

"Well, their heads and bodies were one mass of quills, that had stuck in them when they got too near the porcupine. As the quills are barbed they won't drop out, and when a mountain-lion is fairly bristling with them, his tongue a regular pin cushion, he can't eat or drink and he dies from starvation or from pain and exhaustion. The Indians formerly used the quills, colored in bright hues, to decorate their garments. And a porcupine is mighty good eating—after he's skinned," concluded Uncle Tod, with a chuckle.

"He provides his own toothpicks," added Rick with a laugh.

"That's right," agreed Chot. "But we won't eat these. They're worth more as freaks than roasted."

"I should say so," added the skipper. "I must write to Mr. Driscoll again."

"Esmerelda has laid another egg," reported Chot, when they were once more on board the *Sallie*, and the boxes of porcupines had been put in a safe place.

"She's sure a busy little hen!" said the skipper. "Don't break it taking it out, Chot," he added, as the boy went to where the freak chicken had her coop.

"When you going to start that incubator?" asked Rick.

"To-morrow," his uncle answered. "I have most of the things I need, now. We'll start work on the incubator to-morrow."

This was good news to the boys, who were anxious to see if any freak little chickens would be hatched from the eggs Esmerelda had laid.

"Oh ho! Fish for supper!" exclaimed the captain, when the boys brought from the ice box those they had caught. "You certainly have put in a full day!"

After the meal, "which was enjoyed by all," as a country paper might phrase it, the porcupines were transferred to stronger boxes and

left up on deck near the coop of Esmerelda and then, as the boat was in a good location, it was decided to remain there for the night.

Rick and Chot sat up on deck, talking in the moonlight, while Captain Tod was busy in the cabin below. He seemed to be hammering on something and Rick thought he was working on the incubator until, happening to get up for a drink of water he had a glimpse, through an open port, of a strange scene.

Captain Tod had on the table in front of him a strong brass bound box, and in it he was putting some papers and some of those shining rocks, which Rick and Chot had thought might contain gold or diamonds, though the latter theory was rather a weak one, as both lads admitted.

But there was no question about the brass bound box. Like some small, ancient treasure chest it was, the lid thrown back, and the lock on the table beside the captain.

Some slight noise that Rick made caused the skipper to look up. He did not seem at all put out by being observed, instead, he called, in a most casual voice, for Rick to come to the cabin.



"Like some small, ancient treasure chest it was."

“And bring Chot with you,” added the skipper.

The boys entered to find him just locking the brass bound box, and pointing to it Captain Tod said:

“If anything happens to me, or the *Sallie*, see that this box gets safe to shore, and into your father’s hands, Rick. It is very valuable!”

CHAPTER XII

FILLED WITH SURPRISE

FOR a moment both boys were so surprised at this sudden act of confidence in them, on the part of the skipper, that they could say nothing. Ruddy, too, seemed to know that something unusual was in the air, as he stood in the little cabin, his head on one side, looking at the brass bound box as he always did at some object new to him.

"Take it ashore with you if anything happens," went on Uncle Tod, tapping the strongly-made little chest, which was about a foot square, and about six inches deep. "It has valuables in it."

"Gold?" ventured Rick, after a moment's silence.

"Oh, no, not gold!" chuckled the skipper.

"Diamonds," whispered Chot.

"Diamonds! I should say not; though it does sparkle!" tantalizingly admitted the captain.

"Don't try to guess, boys, you couldn't in a hundred years, I don't believe," went on Uncle Tod. "Though the stuff in here is as common as dirt in some places."

Rick and Chot wondered, in that case, why the contents of the brass bound box were so valuable. But they did not think it wise to press any more questions. Uncle Tod had locked the strong little chest, and now he put it in a small locker where he kept his other possessions.

"I'll hide the key of the locker here," he went on, indicating a little nook in the cabin. "And don't forget—if anything happens—just take the brass bound box and cut ashore. Now we'll tackle the incubator."

"I thought you weren't going to start that until to-morrow," observed Rick.

"Well, we might as well plan it now, and then we can work so much faster. It's a good thing to lay out the next day's work the night before. Come over here and I'll show you what I intend doing."

The captain appeared to be a sort of Jack at all trades, for in a short time he had sketched out a small incubator which, while it was rather crude, seemed fitted to do the work of hatching

out what few eggs Esmerelda would be expected to lay.

"The question is," said Rick, as they were getting ready to turn in for the night, the incubator plans having been finished, "the question is will any queer chickens come out of Esmerelda's eggs?"

"It's a question that can't be answered inside of three weeks," laughed the skipper.

The next day, instead of continuing the cruise, it was decided to remain at "Porcupine Cove," as Rick named the place where the big, spiny rodents had been captured.

The black and white creatures seemed to be quite contented in their new homes. Captain Tod knew with what kind of vegetable food to supply them, and it was brought from ashore fresh every day. The porcupines became quite friendly, though it can not exactly be said that they were "pets." No one could pat them, for their quills came out very easily.

"We might just as well stay here until we finish the incubator," decided Captain Tod. "I'm in no hurry to get to my camp at Long River, and if I find I need something for the

egg-hatching machine I can just walk into town and buy it."

This sort of life just suited the boys. The weather was more glorious than when they had started and they could go swimming and fishing when they pleased. On board the *Sallie* it was like living in a moving camp, with many more advantages than are found in some woodland stopping places.

It was not quite as easy to start the incubator working as even optimistic Captain Tod had supposed. The chief trouble was getting the heat regulated so that it would keep between about 101 and 102 degrees, with the cooling damper opening when the heat touched around 103. But finally, after repeated tests with a thermometer, Captain Tod announced that he was now ready to make a trial of Esmerelda's eggs.

"How many have we?" he asked the boys.

They were brought from the pantry, where they had been carefully kept in a box, wrapped in tissue paper.

"Five," announced Rick.

"Hum!" murmured the captain. "We

ought to have six, at least, to start with. Of course it doesn't make any difference to the incubator how many eggs you stock it with. But I've made places for half a dozen eggs in this one, and it's a pity to start with five."

"Hark!" exclaimed Chot. "I think I hear her cackling now. Maybe she's just laid an egg."

He rushed out on deck, to return a few moments later with a dejected air, but no egg.

"False alarm!" Chot sadly reported.

"Too bad!" exclaimed the skipper. "I hope Esmerelda isn't going to turn out to be that sort of unreliable hen. Even having four legs won't excuse her for giving an egg alarm and then failing," said the skipper with a laugh. "Well, we'll wait a day or so longer and if she doesn't lay another egg we'll start the incubator with five. But mind you," he said to the expectant boys, "the chances are very much against any freak chickens being hatched out!"

"Oh, we're prepared for that," admitted Rick. "Anyhow we have Esmerelda herself for Mr. Driscoll, and the big porcupines."

"Yes, they'll be a good start for his freak show, with that triple clam he has," said the

skipper. "I expect to hear from him in a day or so. But we won't tell him about the incubator lest he place his expectations too high and become disappointed after the hatching. We'll keep that as a surprise, in case it turns out that way."

The incubator having been finished, though the skipper admitted it would be all the better for a longer testing, and there being no further excuse for remaining at Porcupine Cove, the *Sallie's* mooring lines were cast off and the cruise resumed.

For three days they chugged their way up the big river, their next destination being a lake, from which they would emerge into another river and then into the stream on the shore of which the skipper had his camp.

And each day an anxious watch was kept over Esmerelda. Every time she cackled, or showed any unusual activity, there was a rush to her coop, to see if she had laid the sixth egg. But each time her cackling and clucking were only false alarms.

"I think Esmerelda believes she has done her full duty in the matter of laying eggs," said Captain Tod one night, "and we shall have to

content ourselves with five. If by to-morrow, she doesn't lay one to complete the half dozen, I'll start the incubator."

There were indications of a storm as the *Sallie* was made fast to a big overhanging tree on shore, and preparations made to pass the night thus anchored. But as the craft was a staunch one, and not out in the open sea, in fact being well sheltered where she was, the approaching outburst of the elements was not looked forward to with any alarm by the voyagers.

Ruddy had curled up in his accustomed place on deck, under the shelter of the rail, and as the cabin door was left open Rick knew, that in case of rain, his dog would come in. No watch was set and soon all on board the *Sallie* were slumbering, even Esmerelda and the porcupines in their boxes on deck.

For some reason or other, Rick awakened soon after falling into a doze. What disturbed his sleep he did not know, for it was quiet enough in the night that enshrouded the craft and its occupants. The wind was sighing and moaning, however, seeming to whisper of the coming storm, and the waves were slapping the

sides of the *Sallie* as though inviting her to cast off her mooring lines and come out into mid-stream to play.

Rick turned over, and tried to compose himself to sleep, but it appeared to be of little use.

"If it would only rain," he thought, "I'd drop off in a minute. Nothing makes me sleepier than to hear it rain."

But the breaking of the storm was delayed, and, if you have ever noticed it, on such occasions nature itself appears to be as nervous, and under as tense strain, as some individuals. It was like this in Rick's case.

"Well, I'm going up on deck and sit for a while," he told himself. "That will quiet me down."

He slipped from his berth without rousing Uncle Tod or Chot. They seemed to be slumbering heavily. Rick had just reached the open cabin door, and was about to mount the companionway steps when he heard a thud on deck which seemed to indicate that some one, in bare feet or wearing rubber soled shoes, had dropped down from a little height. At the same time Ruddy gave a low growl.

Immediately a cautious voice whispered:

"All right old fellow! Don't make a fuss! We'll be friends!"

Then came the sound of Ruddy's tail pounding a welcome greeting as he thumped the deck with it.

That is one fault of setter dogs—they make friends too easily. They are so unsuspicious and loving that they are easily deceived, and are, therefore, of little value as watch dogs. A burglar or thief, in most instances, can immediately make friends with a setter, who soon welcomes him as one of the family.

And when Rick heard a strange voice talking to his pet, and when the lad had listened to the thumping of the tail, Rick knew, as well as if he had seen him, that some stranger had boarded the *Sallie* and was then patting Ruddy.

The moon was shining fitfully from behind ragged clouds, and by the dim light Rick could see, standing near his dog, the figure of a man—a stranger as far as the boy could judge.

And now, cordial relations having been established with Ruddy, the night visitor proceeded to look about, evidently in search of something of value. There had been no trouble in boarding the *Sallie*, for her rail was close

to the sloping shore. And it was the thud of the man's feet as he leaped down to deck that Rick had heard.

Waiting a moment before giving the alarm, Rick saw the intruder walk softly toward the boxes containing the big porcupines.

"If he sticks his hands in there," said Rick softly to himself, barely restraining a chuckle, "I won't have to say a word!"

And this is just what happened. The boxes which formed pens for the porcupines had covers that could be unhooked and lifted off. In the dim light of the moon the man could not tell what the boxes contained, so he raised one cover and thrust in his bare hand.

A moment later an agonized howl broke the silence of the night, and as Ruddy gave a bark of surprise the visitor, with another howl of pain, leaped overboard.

"What's the matter?" cried Captain Tod, suddenly rousing up.

"Anybody hurt?" Chot wanted to know.

"Yes, a little!" laughed Rick. "And yet I guess he's as surprised as he is hurt."

"Surprised!" repeated the skipper, coming on deck. "Who is surprised?"

“That thief,” and Rick pointed to a distant, swimming figure in the stream. “He must have one hand just about filled with surprises—porcupine quill surprises!”

CHAPTER XIII

QUEER ACTIONS

FOR a moment Captain Tod debated with himself whether to take after the midnight visitor, to hail him, perhaps firing a shot to scare him into surrender, or to let him go.

"Did he get anything?" the skipper asked Rick.

"I think not," the boy answered. "At least nothing more than the porcupine quills, and we'll never miss those, nor will the porcupines either. I couldn't sleep, and I was coming out on deck to get a breath of air, and watch the storm blowing up, when I heard this fellow jump down on the deck."

"Didn't Ruddy go for him?" asked Chot.

"No, that's the trouble with my dog—he's too friendly." Rick answered. "This fellow made up to Ruddy right off."

"What happened then?" asked Captain Tod.

"Well, he walked around the deck, saw the

porcupine boxes, opened one and then he let out a yell."

"I guess there's no use stopping him," decided the skipper. "He is well enough punished. He won't come aboard the *Sallie* again."

And indeed it would have been a hard matter to locate the fleeing would-be thief now, for the darkness had enshrouded him as he swam across the river. He gave no further cries, though to use his hand in swimming, punctured as it was with porcupine quills, must have been very painful.

"Look! There's Tweedledum getting out!" exclaimed Chot, for the porcupines had been temporarily named after those famous characters—Tweedledum and Tweedledee, since they looked very much alike.

"None of that!" cried Rick, as he used a stick gently to urge the porcupine back into the box, the cover of which had been left unhooked by the midnight visitor.

The spiny freak secured, and a casual look around disclosing nothing disturbed, the voyagers went back to bed. Soon after this the

rain began falling, and Rick fell with it—
asleep.

“No egg yet,” reported Chot next day, after a visit to Esmerelda’s coop, following a prolonged period of excited cackling on the hen’s part.

“Well, we won’t wait any longer for her,” decided Captain Tod. “Maybe the water isn’t good for her, though she laid five while we have been afloat. Anyhow I’ll start the incubator and we’ll see if we can get any more freak chickens for friend Driscoll.”

There being no special reason for traveling on in the storm, and as the skipper wanted to make sure he needed nothing further to make the incubator mechanically perfect, it was decided to remain another day and night at Porcupine Cove.

It stormed all that night, the rattle of rain on the deck soothed the two boys to sound slumber, but it seemed to have the opposite effect on the skipper. Rick was dimly conscious that his uncle was roving about the craft practically all night long. In the morning Captain Tod explained that he was up,

"off and on," as he expressed it, to make sure the incubator was operating properly.

"And was it?" Chot asked when they were eating breakfast.

"Seems to be. Of course, being a home-made one, it will need more attention than a regular machine. But I think it will hatch out Esmerelda's eggs," the skipper answered.

The four legged chicken herself seemed to be in good health, and two days after the incubator had been operating she laid another egg.

"If that isn't just like a woman!" laughed Captain Tod. "She never does a thing when you want her to!"

"Can you put this egg in with the others?" asked Rick.

"Well, of course we could, for an incubator isn't like a hen, it won't leave the eggs after it has hatched out some and thinks it has warmed the others long enough. That's the reason you have to put what eggs you want to hatch under a hen all at one time," said the skipper. "But I don't want to open the machine now, to slip this one in. We'll just do

with the five, and have this egg to eat. We'll draw lots for it."

Luck fell to Rick, and when the egg was cooked it proved to have two yolks.

"Maybe two chickens would have come out!" exclaimed Chot.

"I don't believe so," said Captain Tod. "I've seen many a double yolked egg, but never two chickens coming out of the same shell—though I won't say it is impossible."

Following her post-incubator performance, Esmerelda laid an egg every day for the succeeding two, so that the skipper and Chot each had one. But the yolks were only single.

Now that the incubator experiment was under way, and nothing could be told of the success, or non-success, under three weeks, the boys sought for new forms of interest and amusement. Nor were these difficult to find. For they were traveling on, up streams they had never before visited, and they passed through towns and cities of which they had heard, but which they had never seen. So there were plenty of sights to occupy their attention.

At one place where they stopped a letter from Hokum Driscoll awaited them. In it the

former circus man expressed delight at the freak chicken which had been bought for him, and he promised to take it off the skipper's hands at the same price paid for it.

"Pick up any more freaks for me that you see," wrote Mr. Driscoll. "I'll meet you soon," and he named a town some miles distant, which he could reach in his motor boat by taking a different route from that followed by our friends.

"I wonder how he'll like the porcupines?" mused Chot.

"And the freak chickens, if any hatch from Esmerelda's eggs?" added Rick. "But I'm not counting on them."

"No, it isn't wise to count one's chickens before they are hatched," chuckled Captain Tod.

Rick wondered why he had not received an answer to the letter he wrote his mother, speaking of the strange actions of Captain Tod, but the boy concluded she either had not received it yet, or else had written her answer to some other post office where they planned to stop for their mail.

As for the skipper, following the putting away of the brass bound box, his conduct had not been such as to cause Chot or Rick any worry. About the only thing he did that was unusual was to talk to himself, and this would not have caused any uneasiness on Rick's part had it not been that his relative so often murmured:

"Crazy is as crazy does. I'll be crazy enough when I see him!"

Rick very much wanted to know what this meant, but he did not feel like asking. And Captain Tod might not like it—he might think Rick had no right to ask such questions. Thus the cruise, that was so filled with delight, might be brought to a sudden end.

Rick did not want that to happen.

One day, however, after they had chugged their way up the river for several miles, and had made fast to the bank for the night, something happened which again aroused all Rick's fears.

His uncle had gone ashore to the not far distant village, Chot was fishing in a quiet pool some yards below where the *Sallie* was made

fast, and Rick and Ruddy were sitting on deck when the skipper suddenly came on board, having returned from the village.

"I think this will help turn the trick," said the captain.

He began taking the paper from a bundle he had brought with him from the village. Rick caught a curious hollow, booming sound as the wrapping was removed, and then, to his surprise, he saw his uncle holding up a child's drum.

"What would you say if I began to beat this?" asked the skipper with a chuckle.

"What would I say?" repeated Rick, at a loss for the right words in which to reply.

"Yes, suppose I started drumming?"

"Well, replied the boy slowly, "I should—"

"You'd think I was crazy; wouldn't you?" interrupted the captain.

"Maybe not exactly crazy, Uncle Tod, but—"

"Yes, anybody would say I was crazy if, at my age, I started to learn to play the drum. But that's what I'm going to do!" he declared. "I've always wanted to, and I don't see any reason why I shouldn't, even if I am past

sixty! I'm going to learn the drum—Oh, not now!" he hastily added, as he saw a strange look on Rick's face. "It's too near night, and I might surprise some folks on shore and wake up some babies," he added with a laugh. "I wouldn't want to do that. But I'm going to drum—say to-morrow!"

He tapped the skin head of the instrument lightly with his fingers. Chot, fishing down stream, heard the booming sound and looked up toward the *Sallie* in some surprise.

"Chot, what do you make of it?" asked Rick that evening after the supper things had been cleared away, and when the chums were strolling along shore, while Captain Tod sat on deck, gazing across the water. "What do you make of that drum business?"

"I don't know, Rick," was the answer. "If I were you I'd write home and tell them about it. It looks mighty queer to me."

"To me, too! I wonder—"

But at that instant there came a shout from the boat, and they heard Captain Tod crying:

"No you don't! None of that! Get back where you belong!"

Ruddy barked excitedly as he dashed away from the boys and in the direction of the craft, on the deck of which the captain could dimly be seen dancing about in an excited manner.

CHAPTER XIV

DISAPPOINTMENT

RICK and Chot paused for a moment to gaze at one another before dashing off after the dog toward the boat. The same thought was in the minds of both lads—that Captain Tod had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

“It’s that drum!” declared Chot. “He’s trying to do one of those war, or green corn dances he says the Indians do up on the state reservation near his Long River camp.”

“But he isn’t drumming!” objected Rick, as they started on a run toward the *Sallie*. “If he was—well—*queer* enough to try to imitate an Indian dance, he’d be drumming; wouldn’t he?”

“I don’t know,” answered Chot. “Listen to him, will you!”

Again the captain was shouting, and he could still be seen dancing excitedly about, for it was not yet dark, though night was fast coming.

Across the short distance that now separated the boys from him, could be heard the skipper's voice crying:

"Get back in there! Think I'm going to have you jump overboard after all the trouble we had! Get back in your coop!"

Esmerelda's out!" exclaimed Chot, making a wild guess at the cause of the trouble.

"Can't be that," asserted Rick. "She often comes out on deck."

"Then some of the little chickens are hatched!" ventured Chot, and they're trying to run away on their five or six legs—whatever they've got."

" 'Tisn't time for the eggs to hatch," said Rick. "It must be—"

But just then Captain Tod looked up, saw the boys, and, waving his arms at them, he cried:

"Hurry up! Both the porcupines are out and they're going separate ways! I need help!"

"Porcupines!" gasped Chot.

"That explains it," added Rick. And yet he could not help remembering, as he and his chum raced on to the help of the skipper, the

drum Uncle Tod had purchased. What in the world did he want of a drum? This was one of the things Rick wondered about. And what did that talk of his uncle mean—that talk of “crazy is as crazy does?” Also why didn’t Rick’s folks answer his letter, letting him know if there had ever been any insanity in the captain’s family?

These thoughts flashed through the boy’s mind rapidly, as he and Chot made all speed possible back to the *Sallie*. Once there they had no time for thinking of anything but the immediate business in hand—that of getting the spiny porcupines back into their boxes.

For both of the creatures that would not bear handling had escaped at the same time.

“You head ’em back from climbing over the rail, and I’ll get some salt to entice ’em back in their boxes!” ordered the skipper as the boys leaped aboard.

“How’d they get out?” asked Rick, as he headed off the largest porcupine, while Chot got in front of the other.

“Don’t know,” answered the captain as he made a dive for the cabin, to reappear a moment later with a handful of salt. “They must

have loosened the hooks, or maybe Ruddy was playing with the fastenings and slipped them. First I knew they were out. I felt a prickling down near my ankles as I sat on deck, and there was one of the porkies trying to rub against me like a jolly old cat. Easy now and we'll have 'em safe!"

The former trick of the salt worked well, and when a trail of it had been sprinkled along the deck, toward the respective cages of the spiny creatures, they were soon corraled in their boxes, and the lids made doubly fast.

"It's remarkable how fond porcupines are of salt," said the skipper, sitting down and mopping his face, for the night was warm and he had moved about in lively fashion. "Out west I've known 'em to hang around camp and gnaw up boards in a tent flooring just to get at the salt that had been spilled there."

"It's a good thing you knew how to catch 'em," observed Chot.

"Yes," agreed Rick. "It would be too bad if they got away when Mr. Driscoll wants them for his freak show. When's he going to take them, Uncle Tod?"

"Well, I expect we'll meet him in about a

week now," was the answer. "And maybe, by that time, we'll have some other specimens for him."

"Some of Esmerelda's chickens?" inquired Chot.

"Hardly any of them under two weeks," answered the skipper. "They've been in the incubator about a week now. And that reminds me, I must take a look at the machine."

The egg-hatching affair was kept in a compartment forward of the cabin, and while Uncle Tod had gone there to take an inspection the boys remained on deck. Rick gazed at the drum the skipper had purchased, and again disquieting questions came into the lad's mind.

"You don't s'pose he did it on purpose; do you?" asked Chot.

"Did what on purpose?"

"Let those porcupines out."

"Why no, I don't," Rick answered. "What makes you think such a thing?"

"Well, he's acting so queer, and—"

"Yes, he does act queer," Rick admitted, "but I don't believe he'd do that. Those spines would make a nasty sore if they got in a fellow."

"I believe you. And yet it doesn't seem they could get out themselves."

"They won't any more!" declared Rick. "I'm going to make new covers for the cages to-morrow."

The night passed quietly enough, though it must be said that Rick did not sleep well. He was too worried about many matters, and he could not get out of his mind the spectacle of his rather elderly uncle beating a child's drum.

However when morning came, instead of beginning practice with the percussion instrument as he had said he would do, the skipper seemed to forget all about it.

"Well, boys, we'll travel on," he said, when breakfast had been served. "We're going to have a fine day," and so it proved.

All that lay they "chugged" up the river; "chugged" being about the only word that properly describes the progress of a motor boat, for it doesn't sail and it doesn't steam, though, of course, steam does come from the muffler at times.

They made fast that night at the edge of a good-sized town, and all three going ashore

found letters awaiting them at the post office. There were several for Captain Tod.

"One's from Driscoll," he announced. "He'll meet us three days from now at Cardiff. He's picked up several other freaks and he wants to open a show soon."

"I hope we have some four or five legged chickens for him," remarked Chot.

Rick said nothing. He was busy reading a letter from home, but, to his surprise, not a word was in it about the matter on which he had written. His father and mother sent their regards to Uncle Tod, but gave no hint as to whether or not he might be insane.

"I can't understand it!" mused Rick. "However, I've got to stick to him, that's sure. And I'll write again, and put a special delivery stamp on. If that doesn't bring an answer I'll telegraph!"

Rick intended to write his letter that night, but on getting back to the boat Captain Tod suddenly decided that he would take up the matter of drumming, and he banged away, in a most amateur manner, until Rick and Chot, acting as good-natured over it as possible, laughingly left the boat for a stroll on shore.

"Isn't that the limit!" exclaimed Chot, while the booming sound became more faint as they increased the distance from the *Sallie*.

"It sure is queer," agreed Rick. "If I had time I'd go back to town now and send a telegram; telling my folks all about this."

"Let's wait a while," suggested Chot. "Sometimes, you know, old folks get childish, and maybe it's nothing worse than this in your Captain Tod. I remember my grandmother, who, just before she died around ninety years old, had a doll she played with."

"Yes, but Uncle Tod isn't as old as that, and besides, I hope he isn't going to die!" exclaimed Rick.

"I hope not, either. But maybe this drum business doesn't mean anything."

"Oh, it means *something*!" declared Rick. "The only thing is to find out what it *does* mean. But I reckon I've got to stick to Uncle Tod."

"That's right!" chimed in his chum. "We can't desert the skipper nor the boat!"

The drumming was brought to an unexpected stop soon after this talk, for from a houseboat, moored a short distance away from the *Sallie*

came protesting hails, and Captain Tod, with a good-natured laugh agreed to "cut it out," as the protestants asked him to do.

"I'll get so I can drum better after a while," he told they boys with a cheerful grin, when they came back to the boat.

Rick did not feel like asking him why he wanted to perfect himself on this instrument.

The next day they started on again, but had not gone more than a few miles when there was a series of strange sounds from the motor compartment, and the captain, reaching the place on the jump, shut off the power with a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" shouted Rick, who was feeding 'Esmerelda.

"She's starting to chew up her bearings. Oil pump isn't working! This is bad!"

And unfortunate enough it was, for the engine was put out of commission by the accident. As you boys probably know, the "bearings" of a motor consist of a particular kind of metal which makes friction less. The crank shaft, where the piston rod turns it, and the open end of the piston rod are lined with "Babbitt," or other metal. This is kept oiled, just as the

"brasses" in the journals of railroad car wheels are kept lubricated by a mass of cotton waste saturated with oil.

If this lubrication fails the metal becomes dry and if it is kept in motion it heats, and the engine is said to be "chewing up her bearings." The soft lining of the friction surfaces is worn away.

This is what happened to the engine of the *Sallie*, and it meant a delay of several days until new bearings could be made and put in place.

"We'll have to send word to Mr. Driscoll that we can't meet him at Cardiff as promised," said Captain Tod, and this was done.

The accident, with the succeeding work in making repairs, put out of Rick's mind his plan of sending further word to his father and mother about his suspicions regarding Uncle Tod. And, while they were laid up for repairs, the skipper's actions were all that could be desired, even to omitting performances on the drum. Rick began to feel that perhaps there was nothing wrong after all.

"I'll wait a bit longer," he said. "Maybe

my folks didn't get my other letter, and it may be just as well they didn't."

In due time the *Sallie's* engine was fitted with new bearings, and the defect in the oiling system corrected. Once more they started off, and when they reached Cardiff they found Hokum Driscoll and his family, aboard the *Pet* awaiting them. The former circus man had cruised down an intersecting river to meet his friends.

"Well, where are all these freaks I hear about?" asked Mr. Driscoll, when greetings had been exchanged.

"Here they are!" cried Rick, leading the way to the deck coop of *Esmerelda* and the boxes of the porcupines.

"Good!" exclaimed the showman. "They sure are worth having! I'll have a great ballyhoo!"

"What's a ballyhoo?" asked Rick. "Is that some other freak animal?"

Hokum Driscoll laughed.

"Ballyhoo is a word that isn't in any dictionary I ever came across," he answered. "It means something that a showman can get out

in front of his tent and shout about as an attraction to get people inside. These porcupines and the freak chicken will be a great ballyhoo—that is I can have the barker yell his head off about 'em."

"What's a barker?" Chot wanted to know.

"He's the man who stands ouside and sells tickets, and also talks about what's on the inside of the tent to get those on the outside to go in," was the showman's reply. "A' good barker and some ballyhoos like these are half of a show. I'm much obliged to you for getting me these, and I'll pay you all you spent and more too. What did you pay for the porcupines?"

"Nothing," answered Rick.

"Then that's all clear profit, for I'll buy 'em of you," which he did, giving the boys each five dollars. They thought this was too much, but Captain Tod said it wasn't, and as he refused to take any share of the money Rick and Chot had some unexpected cash to spend. Mr. Driscoll also repaid the skipper what he had spent for Esmerelda, and then, as it was nearly time for the eggs to hatch, the "ballyhoo" showman decided to wait and see what might come out of the incubator.

"One of the eggs is crackin'," reported little Mary one day, when she had come over to the *Sallie*, on a visit with Mr. and Mrs. Driscoll. "I think a kippie is comin' out." ("Kippie" was her word for little chicken.)

"Oh, we must see this!" cried Hokum Driscoll. "I never saw a real freak come into being."

But alas for their hopes! Four of the five eggs that had been put into the incubator hatched, but the little chickens were just ordinary ones—no extra legs, tails or anything. "But they is awful cute little kippies!" declared Mary.

"You may have them for your own," offered Captain Tod.

"I'll let Esmerelda take care of 'em for me," decided Mary, and this was done, the four legged hen graciously accepting the chickens in whose bringing into the world she had no hand, or, rather, to be more correct, no feather.

CHAPTER XV

LONG RIVER CAMP

HOWEVER, even if the eggs that Esmerelda had laid did not turn out any extraordinary chickens, Mr. Driscoll felt that he was well started on his freak show.

"I've heard of some other queer animals I can pick up around this part of the country," he announced when the hen, the porcupines and the little "kippies" had been transferred to his boat. "Here's a chap who wants to get rid of a rooster with an owl's head."

"A rooster with an owl's head!" exclaimed Rick, as Hokum Driscoll drew from his pocket a copy of the trade magazine "Billboard," which is the official organ of many showmen.

"That's what he advertises," went on Mr. Driscoll. "Look!"

He turned to a page of small advertisements wherein the boys saw offered for sale not only ordinary animals such as monkeys, elephants, tigers, trained cats, dogs and canaries, but

"great ballyhoos," such as a freak cow, with five perfect legs, a "bat fish," stuffed sharks, and a "devil headed rooster."

"I don't take much stock in that last," declared Mr. Driscoll. But this fellow who says he has a rooster with an owl's head isn't far from here, and I'm going to look him up."

"What's the matter with the devil headed one?" asked Captain Tod.

"Most likely to be a fake. Besides, I don't want anything that wouldn't be decent for ladies and children to come in and see. I never ran anything but a good show," said Mr. Driscoll, with a look of pride and affection toward his wife and little girl, "and I'm not going to begin now. Everything I have is above board."

"What do you reckon this rooster with an owl's head is like?" Chot wanted to know.

"Oh, I s'pose there's some freak, but odd, arrangement of the feathers around its head," the showman answered. "Anyhow if it looks like an owl I can truthfully ballyhoo it that way. So I'll be going over to see it in a few days. Meanwhile, if you hear of any more freaks pick 'em up for me—if you can get 'em without paying too much."

Captain Tod promised that he would do this and he and the boys having bought some supplies and provisions for Long River Camp, which they would reach in a few days, said farewell, for the time, to Hokum Driscoll and his family.

On chugged the *Sallie* until one morning, after several days of travel, Captain Tod turned the prow of the boat into the quiet waters of a big stream.

"Long River!" announced the skipper. "Here we are, boys!"

"Where's camp?" asked Rick.

"Oh, quite a few miles up. But I'm beginning to feel at home already!"

Indeed there was a distinct change in the Captain's manner, noticeable to both lads. Since meeting with Mr. Driscoll, and getting rid of the freaks, the skipper had been much quieter. Rick had almost come to the conclusion that his previous opinions were all wrong, and that his uncle's mind was not affected. He did not carry out his intention of writing or telegraphing his folks.

"Yes, we'll soon be at Long River Camp—my

place," the captain went on. "And then you'll see some doings, boys!"

For just an instant Rick was impressed by that word "doings," but as Chot gave a joyous shout, in anticipation of the outdoor fun to come, Rick's suspicions were lulled, and he began to believe that Uncle Tod only meant they would have good times in the woods and cruising on the river.

Up the stream went the *Sallie*. The craft was running much better since new bearings had replaced those she "chewed up," but Captain Tod did not get all the speed possible out of her.

"There's no great rush," he told the boys. "The camp won't run away, though I wish Slither would!" and he added the last with such energy that Rick looked up in surprise and asked:

"Who's Slither?"

It was a matter that had been troubling him ever since he had come upon his uncle in the woods, and had heard the skipper muttering about "crazy is as crazy does!"

"Slither, oh, he calls himself my partner, and

he was—once—but he isn't any more!" was the answer.

"Did you have a fight?" asked Rick.

"Well, not exactly a fight. It's too long a story to tell now. But Slither is at Long River Camp, and I don't hanker on spending any more time with him than I have to. I'm enjoying myself now, and I won't, quite so much, when I see Slither. So there's no use in hurrying."

Keeping to this resolution, the skipper held down the speed of the Sallie. It was pleasant voyaging up Long River, and to Rick and Chot it was a new country, the state through which it flowed being several hundred miles removed from their seaside home.

"Any fish here?" asked Chot eagerly, as he surveyed the water, which was quiet in spots, and again turbulent as it flowed between narrowed banks, while in some places there were rapids, studded with ugly rocks. These locations the skipper gave a wide berth.

"Fish?" repeated Captain Tod with a chuckle, "Well, I should say so! I've pulled out some big ones. We'll try our luck to-night, as we'll have to lay over when it gets dark.

There's a bad spot in the river, just above here, and I don't want to navigate it except by daylight."

"I'll overhaul the tackle," suggested Rick, and with Ruddy lying at his feet on deck the boy proceeded to get the fishing gear in shape.

Captain Tod had spoken truthfully when he mentioned fish in connection with Long River, for baited hooks had scarcely been tossed into the stream before there were bites, and soon all three voyagers were busy landing prize beauties of the finny tribe.

They had anchored for the night in a quiet cove, and it bore out the appearance it had presented in the early evening, for scarcely a sound disturbed our friends until morning.

Once again they moved slowly up stream, passing through a series of rapids, and at noon Captain Tod, who had stationed himself in the bow, while Rick steered, gave a cry of:

"There she is!"

"What?" asked Chot.

"My camp—Long River Camp! Here we are! And there's that rat Slither!" he added in a lower voice.

The boys looked to where he pointed. The river broadened out and flowed between wide, green meadows, though at one point on the left, as they ascended the stream, there was a high bluff. And it was on a shoulder of this bluff, perhaps twenty-five feet above the stream, and some distance away that a log cabin could be made out.

As the boys looked, a figure left the cabin and came down a path to the river.

"That's him—the rat!" muttered the captain again, and there was a look on his uncle's face Rick did not like to see. At once the boy's doubts and fears came rushing back into his mind.

"Nice camp!" observed Chot.

"Yes, it is a good one," said the captain. "I hope you boys will enjoy it there. I know you would, only for one thing—but why talk about that now. Maybe I can put over my big idea, and if I do—"

His voice trailed off as though he might be talking to himself.

As the *Sallie* came nearer to the camp, the lone figure paused and gazed under a shading hand. Then a voice hailed:

"That you Tod?"

"Yes, and I've brought company. Get a fire started!"

There was nothing in the skipper's voice, as he made this answer, to indicate that he harbored any feelings toward his partner, and Rick and Chot were much surprised to see the two men shake hands, cordially enough, it appeared.

After having heard the not very complimentary name "rat" used in connection with Slither to whom they were introduced, Rick and his chum did not know what to think, after seeing the skipper thus seemingly so friendly with the man. Slither was not exactly prepossessing. He had an ugly face, with a long, thin jaw, shifty eyes and teeth which are commonly described as "buck"—that is they protruded over his under lip, not adding anything to the beauty of his face.

But he seemed cordial enough, welcoming the boys and making himself busy in starting a fire, while the skipper and the boys brought on shore their belongings, and such food as had not been eaten on the voyage.

"Did you see him take it ashore?" asked Rick

of Chot, when they were alone on the *Sallie*, unloading the last of the supplies.

"Take what ashore?"

"That kid's drum he bought."

"No, I didn't see it at all. In fact I haven't noticed it lately. Have you?"

"No, and I'm wondering."

And the boys wondered still more, when a little later, they found under some coils of rope, the smashed wooden part of the drum. But the skin heads were missing.

"There's some mystery here," decided Rick.

CHAPTER XVI

SLITHER ASKS QUESTIONS

MYSTERY there was, indeed, Chot assented when his chum put out this idea; but what it was, and how to solve it, were other matters. At present the best plan seemed to be to say nothing about it, but to watch for what was to happen next.

And, somewhat to the disappointment of Rick and Chot, to say naught of Ruddy, nothing very much happened. They were at Long River Camp, and though Nick Slither was not the best appearing camp comrade they could have selected, he seemed anxious enough to please, not only Captain Tod, but also the boys and Ruddy too; for he made friends with the setter; no very difficult task as any of you know who have ever owned this breed of dogs.

"Wonder why the skipper called him a rat?" ventured Chot while he and Rick were seeing that the *Sallie* was well made fast.

"Give it up," answered Rick. "But we'll

just have to keep our eyes peeled. I don't like that Slither."

"Nor I. But it's queer why your uncle should buy a drum and bust it."

"Yes, and that isn't the only queer thing. But we won't say anything now."

To this Chot agreed, and having thus set out a line of action the boys began to enjoy themselves. Long River Camp was well located for a pleasant summer visit. There were high hills, almost mountains, behind it, and a fine river in front, while woods surrounded it on three sides. The camp was located on the sloping side of a big valley, through which flowed Long River.

"Any hunting in these woods?" asked Rick, as all four sat down to the rough table in the log cabin for their first meal together.

"Plenty—in season," answered Nick Slither. "You boys want to come up here in the fall."

"I'd like to!" exclaimed Chot.

"Maybe you can," said the captain.

"Did you finish up all the business you—er—went to look after?" asked Uncle Tod's partner, with a side glance at the boys.

"Yes—most of it," answered the skipper.

"Satisfactory?"

"Fairly so."

"You didn't sell our claim?"

"Our claim? Mine, you mean!" came the sharp rejoinder.

"Well, of course *part* of it is yours alone," assented the buck-toothed man. "But we agreed to share in the biggest part of it."

"Yes, but there isn't anything worth sharing in the part we both own together," declared the skipper testily. "All there is seems to be a lot of trees, and lumber isn't worth enough—especially this kind—to make it worth while to cut."

"Well, we got to share whatever we get out of this," asserted Slither, and the two men seemed so near the verge of a quarrel that Rick and Chot were glad when a knock came on the cabin door, and a hearty voice called:

"The skipper back?"

"Yes, come in, Tom," answered Captain Tod. "Pull up a chair and have some grub," he invited. "My nephew, or, rather, my niece's son, and his chum," and he indicated Rick and Chot.

"Whose dog?" asked the newcomer, a bluff,

jovial and red-faced individual who might have been either a farmer or lumber jack.

"Mine," answered Rick. "Shake, Ruddy!" he commanded and the setter held out a paw which the man, addressed as Tom, quickly grasped giving a genial laugh.

"Heard you went down to the city visitin', Cap'n," said Tom, whose other name, Rick learned later, was Martin.

"Yes, little matter of business," answered the skipper. "I brought a motor boat back with me."

"So I see—a jim-dandy, too. What you calcalatin' on doin' with her?"

"Oh, just for pleasure. She's a good one—we came all the way from the coast in her."

"So I heard. Well, we're glad to see you back. Didn't sell off your timber tract; did you?"

"No, and I don't ever believe we will. What timber there is here won't pay for cutting."

"You're right there—not until the Canada forests begin to get thinned out more'n they are now."

"Well, something's got to be done about this claim!" broke in Slither, waving his hand

to take in the stretch of woods about the cabin. "I've got an interest in this and I want my money out of it, that's what I want!"

"Your money!" cried Captain Tod, with a look of anger on his face. "You didn't put any money in! I put up the cash to close the deal."

"Yes, but I helped Old Man Harrison, and he owed me something, so I share in this land he passed on to you!"

"Don't start the old quarrel!" suggested Mr. Martin with a laugh. "You two never seem to get anywhere on this business. Better let it drop."

Rick and Chot wished this would be done, for it was not very pleasant for them to be present when high words went on. They had not imagined—or at least Rick had not imagined—anything like this would develop when he agreed to accompany Uncle Tod back to camp. And the skipper seemed to realize this, for, after those few high words he turned to the boys and said:

"Don't mind our talk. It's only a business deal that maybe we can straighten out sooner or later."

"That's the way to talk," declared Tom Martin with a hearty laugh, of which he seemed to have a good supply on tap.

"By the way," spoke Uncle Tod, seemingly anxious to change the subject," know of any freaks around here, Tom?"

"Freaks? What do you mean, Tod?"

"Well odd animals—four legged chickens or five legged hogs—anything like that."

"You might try Indian Johnnie Green! He's odd enough," chuckled Mr. Martin.

"Are there really Indians around here?" asked Rick eagerly, while Chot's eyes grew brighter.

"Don't get excited, boys!" said Mr. Martin. "The only Indians are some tame ones that the state has pensioned off on a reservation around here. They were wild enough once—or some of them were. Old Johnnie Green is one of the oldest—used to be quite a character in his day."

"What's his freak specialty?" asked Chot.

"His stomach! It's as big as a barrel, and as hard as nails, like an athlete's. He used to let the summer visitors, who occasionally stroll up in these hills, kick or bang him in the

stomach for a quarter. Two kicks for half a dollar."

"What in the world for?" Rick asked. "That sounds—" he was going to say "crazy," but as he remembered his uncle he changed the word to "queer"!

"Old Johnnie Green *is* queer!" chuckled Mr. Martin. "But that's what he used to do—let summer visitors, who were looking for sensations, kick him in the stomach for a quarter, or two bits."

"Hard?" asked Chot.

"Hard what?" Mr. Martin wanted to know.

"Did they kick him hard?"

"Oh, yes, to'loble so."

"Didn't it hurt him?" inquired Rick, laughing at the queer idea.

"Didn't seem to!" chuckled Tom Martin. "Johnnie was always hungry after any one kicked him, or punched him in the stomach. It gave him an appetite, I reckon.

"Of course to some people," went on Tom Martin, "It may seem a rather impolite thing to have an Indian offer to let you belt him a couple of good whacks in the stomach, but lots of white athletes so develop themselves

that they can take very hard blows on their abdomens without flinching. In fact it's part of their training.

"I remember one who had across his stomach three big, broad bands of muscle that you couldn't make an impression on with axe, it seemed to me. Johnnie Green was like that. He had developed his stomach, or maybe he came by it naturally, until it was like iron, you could boot him as hard as you liked and he never turned aside—kept on grinning all the while. You remember him; don't you?" and he turned to Uncle Tod after this somewhat lengthy explanation.

"Yes," agreed the skipper, "though I've sort of lost track of him. But he isn't the kind of freak Hokum Driscoll wants. He's after two headed frogs, or something like that."

"Oh, I see what you mean. Well, I don't know of any, but if I come across 'em, I'll remember. Course you wouldn't know Old Johnnie Green," he added to Mr. Slither.

"No, I'm a comparative stranger in these parts. But who is this Driscoll person?" he asked Uncle Tod.

"Fellow we met up with on our way here,"

was the somewhat ungracious answer. It was clear that Uncle Tod and his partner were not on very friendly terms, and the boys wondered what was back of it all—wondered, too, why the skipper had broken the drum on which he had announced his intention to perform.

“Unless he gave up in disgust,” thought Rick, and then he added to his wonder over that, some thoughts on the general actions of his mother’s relative since he had seen the old man in the Belemere woods.

Long River Camp was an ideal place to stay from the viewpoint of Rick, Ruddy and Chot. After their first meal relations seemed a bit more cordial between Uncle Tod and the buck-toothed partner. When Tom Martin had left, promising to come again and to keep an eye open for freaks, Rick and Chot were feeling much better.

The log cabin was so arranged that four could sleep most comfortably in it. There were three rooms, one having two bunks in it, and this was assigned to the boys.

The other rooms contained one bunk each, and these served for Captain Tod and Nick Slither respectively. Whether his uncle had

built the cabin, and thus arranged it so he would not have to sleep in the same room with his partner, Rick did not know, and had no chance to ask for a while.

There was a sort of lean-to, or addition, on the cabin, and in this the cooking was done and the meals served. But now, with the advent of warm weather, Captain Tod said they would put up a canvas shelter and eat out of doors.

"We'll put that up to-morrow," he told the boys.

It might have been expected that Rick and Chot would not sleep very well their first night in camp, having been accustomed to the boat. But tired boyhood knows no such thing as wakeful nights, unless something unusual occurs, and so both lads were in dreamland soon after crawling into their bunks.

It was when Uncle Tod had gone up the river in the *Sallie*, next day "to see a man," leaving Rick and Chot with Slither to put up the canvas eating shelter, that the buck-toothed partner began asking several questions of the boys.

"Did you notice anything funny about Captain Tod on your way here, boys?" he opened with.

"What do you mean by funny?" countered Rick, nudging his chum to indicate that the latter was to keep quiet.

"I mean did he talk about any big fortune up here in the hills—at this camp I mean—a fortune in gold or diamonds?"

"No, he didn't say a word about it," truthfully answered Rick. He did not believe he had the right to speak about the brass bound box and the glittering rocks.

"No?" Nick Slither seemed rather surprised. "Did he talk much about me?" he asked.

"No," was all the answer Rick gave. For, in truth, his uncle had not talked *much* about the partner, though what had been said was not very complimentary.

"Well, we don't get along as well as we might," admitted Slither. "You see your uncle and I met out west. We befriended a man named Harrison, and in return he gave us title to this land. I claim your uncle and I own this together, but he says there is a part he owns all by himself. That's one dispute. Old Man Harrison seemed to set a good value on this tract, though we haven't been able to find out why, nor what it's good for. I don't

believe it's worth anything, and I'm trying to find out why your uncle acts so queerly about a certain part of it. I've a good notion to—"

But what it was Mr. Slither planned to do he never told, for just as he was about to make what Rick hoped was a disclosure, there was a sound of some one approaching, and, a moment later, there stalked into the camp clearing what Rick and Chot at first took to be a veritable giant of a colored man. A second look, however, showed him to be a ragged Indian.

"Old Johnnie Green!" exclaimed Mr. Slither.

"Um!" grunted the visitor. Then, catching sight of the boy strangers he grinned at them, thrust out his overhanging stomach and invited: "You kick um hard two bits?"

For a moment Rick and Chot were rather shocked by this frank—not to say freak—offer. But they reflected that an Indian might well be as proud of his hard stomach as any more civilized fighter, of the boxing or wrestling class. Where is the difference?



"You kick um hard two bits?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE INDIAN DRUM

OLD JOHNNIE GREEN looked from Rick to Chot, and then back to Rick again. Once more the Indian thrust out his stomach and grunted.

"You kick 'em hard—two bits! Johnnie Green never say nothin'!"

"No, they don't want to kick you, Johnnie," explained Mr. Slither. "They aren't summer visitors. This lad is Captain Tod's nephew, or half nephew, which is the same thing, and this is a friend of his," and the buck-toothed man nodded at Chot.

"Who's um dog?" asked Johnnie Green, seemingly more interested now in the animal than in the boys.

"Mine," answered Rick, and Ruddy was already making friends with the newcomer, who patted the dog's head.

"Good thing he isn't a white dog," said Mr. Slither, under his breath.

"Why?" asked Rick.

"'Cause the Indians on the reservation have a celebration every year when they sacrifice a white dog. If they can't get one of their own they take the first one they come across; white or not. They aren't so particular of late I hear.

"No have white dog feast now!" exclaimed Old Johnnie Green. "Not 'till after Corn Dance."

"That's so," admitted Mr. Slither. "I don't know much about these Indian customs, only what I heard Captain Tod tell about. But they do kill white dogs, I know."

"Could we ever go to that other dance—what did you call it?" asked Rick eagerly. He and Chot were beginning to see great possibilities in their visit to Long River Camp.

"Why, I reckon you could go," answered Mr. Slither. "You mean the Corn Dance. I've heard Captain Tod tell about it—he's been to 'em, seein' as he's a native around here. He says about all they do is to yell, what they call singin' I s'pose, and rattle dried corn in pigs' bladders!"

"I'd like to see it!" declared Rick.

"You boys come!" invited Old Johnnie Green. "Kickum hard two bits!" and he patted his over-big stomach. "No hurt Old Johnnie Green!" and catching up a heavy stick of wood he pounded it on his abdomen until the air was booming with sound, but the Indian never showed a sign of distress.

It was the poor pagan's one talent, and we must not blame him for putting it forward on every occasion. I am not upholding him in it, nor excusing those who encouraged him, who were, perhaps, more to blame than Johnnie Green. I am aware that it was not the nicest thing in the world to do, but who expects a half-civilized Indian to be perfectly proper? Not I, for one!

Rick and Chot wanted to laugh, but did not know that it would be exactly the right thing to do, and they were rather relieved when the Indian ambled away, leaving them free to ask questions of Mr. Slither.

But the latter knew little of Indian customs, not having lived in that section of the country long—in fact having only recently come back from the west with Captain Tod.

The advent of Old Johnnie Green, with his

chorus of "kick um hard two bits," seemed to have thrown Mr. Slither off the track of asking questions of the boys, concerning what they had seen Captain Tod doing while on the cruise from Belemere. Rick was glad of this.

While the boy had certain uneasy suspicions regarding his uncle, he did not feel that he should mention them to the buck-toothed man, particularly when Uncle Tod had spoken of his partner as a "rat."

"He must have some good reason for it," reasoned Rick, "and I'm not going to do anything to make trouble for Uncle Tod. All the same I'd like to know what he's up to, and what he meant when he said crazy is as crazy does."

However there was no chance to find this out, though Rick resolved to keep his eyes "peeled"; and if the time came to help his uncle against Partner Slither, who, truth to tell, neither Rick nor Chot particularly liked, Rick would side with the skipper.

Captain Tod came back from his little excursion, saying nothing of his errand. He greeted the boys cordially, nodded at Mr. Slither, and then proposed a tramping trip through the woods for his nephew and Chot.

Of course there was no keeping Ruddy back from this outing, and boys and dog had a great time wandering through the forest, with no particular object in view.

Captain Tod, however, did seem to have some end in mind on this trip, for he walked on rather more speedily than do persons merely out for a stroll to pass the time. On occasions, too, he stopped and seemed to be calculating the layout of the land, the course of brooks and the rock formation.

"Is there any mining going on around here?" asked Rick, when they stopped to eat a little lunch they had brought with them.

"None that I ever heard of—why do you ask?" inquired Captain Tod, and Rick thought his uncle looked at him rather sharply.

"Oh, I just wondered," was the answer. "I don't see what you and Mr. Slither can make money at off this land; and he did say something about prospecting. I thought prospecting meant digging for gold or silver."

"Oh, no, you can prospect for oil and other things under ground," replied the skipper. "But I don't imagine Slither will find much here, however hard he prospects. I've got to

keep watch of him, though, and if you boys see him digging around anywhere, as if he might be sinking a shaft, let me know."

Rick and Chot promised, vaguely wondering what it all meant.

This woodland excursion was but one of many and with fishing, swimming and paddling on the river in a canoe that belonged to camp, formed the chief delights of the two lads and Ruddy—for the dog went everywhere with them. Often Captain Tod would accompany the lads, and again they would go off by themselves. Mr. Slither never was in the party, however, and there seemed to be what might be termed "armed neutrality" between him and Captain Tod.

Once when the boys were out in the woods with Ruddy, they broke through the underbrush into a little clearing, and from a tumble-down shack there emerged Old Johnnie Green.

"Hello!" greeted Rick. "You live here?"

"Sure! You kick um hard two bits!" he again invited, smilingly.

"Not today!" laughed Chot.

"Got any arrows, or tomahawks?" asked Rick, eager for a real Indian relic.

"No got. Squaw maybe down reservation hab some," grunted the Indian.

"Where is the reservation?" asked Rick, for they had not yet visited the small section of the valley, set aside by the state, for the use of the Redmen, who had once owned all that territory.

"This part," said Old Johnnie Green, indicating his own cabin. "You come I show you more."

He led the way along a path that ran in front of his shack, where he lived alone, it seemed. Reaching a big rock that jutted out, overhanging the valley, Johnnie Green pointed to a collection of huts, log cabins, slab-sided houses and what seemed to be a church, nestled along the bank of a creek.

"There Castle," he announced, and the boys learned later that this was the Indian village of the reservation, and that the "Castle," as it was called, was the big building, like a church, where the Indians met on certain occasions each year to hold feasts and dances, in accordance with ancient customs.

There were two factions among what was left of the Indians. Many of them had intermar-

ried among "poor whites" and negroes, and while part of the residents of the reservation held to the old beliefs of their ancestors, some had become converts to the Christian religion. Old Johnnie Green was a pagan of the pagans.

"You think maybe some squaw down in the village has Indian arrows and tomahawks?" asked Rick.

"I t'ink mebbly so—yep! You kick um hard—two bits?" invited Johnnie Green as a last resort when Rick and Chot strolled away. They laughingly refused, determined to save their money for the purchase of relics if they could find any.

Indian squaws, however much they might cling to the traditions of their forefathers, had their own ideas about the value of such relics as they had preserved from a bygone age. And though one or two of them did show the boys some stone hatchet heads and arrow points, they asked more for them than the same relics could be bought for in a curio shop.

So the boys called this part of their excursion off, and wandered about the Indian Reservation as they pleased, little attention being paid to them, since summer visitors were com-

mon. Not that there was much to see; though a passing farmer pointed to the small creek that ran through the Indians' land, and told the boys it once "ran red with blood," after some battle between the early white settlers and the Redmen.

Returning to Long River camp the boys did not find matters there as pleasant as might be. There seemed to have been a quarrel between Uncle Tod and Partner Slither, for the two sat far apart, shrouded in gloomy silence, not speaking.

"I declare I can't make you out!" Mr. Slither was saying in fretful tones as the boys came up the hill. "You're a mystery to me!"

"Glad of it!" announced the skipper with a grin in the direction of his nephew. "Mighty glad of it!"

"Hu!" snorted the buck-toothed man, as he got up and walked out into the woods. "This *sure* beats me!"

As Uncle Tod gave no explanation of what had happened, neither Rick nor Chot felt like asking any questions, but they were puzzled, not to say a bit alarmed and uncomfortable, over it.

That night, when they were all seated out in front of the cabin, fighting away such mosquitoes as were not driven off by a smudge fire built to windward, there suddenly sounded on the quiet evening a low and distant booming sound.

"What's that—thunder?" asked Rick, as Ruddy started up with a growl.

"Thunder? No!" exclaimed Uncle Tod. "Listen!"

They remained quiet.

Again came the booming sound, now louder than at first.

"I was afraid of this," said Captain Tod, ominously rising from his chair that was tilted back against the side of the cabin. "I was afraid of this!"

"But what is it?" asked Rick.

"The Indian drum," was the solemn answer. "It means trouble—it always does when the Indian drum sounds. Johnnie Green and his gang are going to start a ruction again. That's it, sure as guns! The Indian drum!"

CHAPTER XVIII

SLITHER IS AFRAID

RICK and Chot, to do them justice, were not nearly so alarmed over the excited exclamations of Captain Tod as might have been expected in boys of their age. Truth to tell they were rather glad, than otherwise. For they were normal lads, and their Boy Scout activities had taught them a love for adventures in the open.

Of course this isn't saying that any troop of Boy Scouts would welcome an attack by half civilized Indians, but if such an attack had to come I don't believe any body of youngsters would be any better to meet it than those same Boy Scouts.

Captain Tod sprang away from his chair in such haste that he tipped it over as he ran into the cabin, to emerge with a rifle.

"Slither, get your gun!" he sharply ordered.

The effect of this command on the buck-toothed man was curious. He seemed to shrink

in his clothes, as though he wished he might hide himself completely in them.

"Do you—do you think there's goin' to be trouble?" faltered Slither.

"Do I *think* so? I'm *sure* of it!" cried Skipper Tod, and Rick noticed the tense excitement in his uncle's voice. "I know these Indians better than you do, Slither. Whenever that drum sounds it means they are having one of their queer dances. And this isn't the time of year for the Corn Dance or the White Dog Feast. It's something else, and I think they're after us!"

"After *us*?" exclaimed the partner. "*Us*? You mean that?"

"Yes. Don't stand there talking. Get your gun! There may be fighting. You boys get in the cabin!" he ordered.

"But we want to fight, too!" exclaimed Rick.

"Sure!" eagerly added Chot. "Haven't you any more guns?"

"This is no place for boys!" went on Captain Tod. "I promised your parents I'd look after you, and keep you out of trouble. And these Indians can make the worst kind of trouble once they get started. Go inside!"

"We aren't afraid!" declared Rick, snapping his fingers to call Ruddy back to his side, for the dog had run a little way into the now dark woods to investigate the queer, booming sound.

"I know you aren't afraid," admitted Captain Tod. "That's just the reason I'm not going to let you poke your heads into danger. I told your fathers and mothers I'd look after you."

"But you didn't know there's to be an Indian fight," said Chot.

"No, I didn't figure on that," conceded the skipper. "They're coming nearer," he added, as the drum boomed out again.

"We'll take all the blame," urged Rick. "It isn't fair for us to stay in the cabin when there's fighting. We want to do our share! If you two are hurt we'll have to fight anyhow!"

"Yes, maybe," said the skipper. "But wait until we are. Now you go inside," he ordered again. "Maybe we'd all better go in," he went on. "Slither, aren't you going to get your gun?" and he spoke fiercely to the buck-toothed man.

"I—er—of course I'll get my gun, but what in the world are these beggars coming after us for, Captain Tod? We never did anything to them!"

"Except take some of their land, maybe," said the skipper grimly.

"Their land?" cried Slither. "Why, this property was deeded to us—to you and me jointly—by Old Man Harrison, after we saved his life out west. It doesn't belong to the Indians at all."

"All this was Indian land once," said the captain. "The whites just took it as they pleased, and shoved the Indians off on a reservation. Of course we, personally, didn't do it, and Old Man Harrison didn't, either, but the Indians don't know that. They think because we're on what was once their hunting grounds that maybe we're to blame, and they're coming after us. Get your gun, Slither! Get your gun! There may be fighting!"

"All right—I'll get it! You needn't come for me that way!" cried the now thoroughly frightened partner, for Captain Tod had advanced fiercely toward him.

"Come on inside!" said Uncle Tod, looking

toward the boys. "Bring your dog in, too," he added to Rick. "Maybe those Indians won't be so particular whether he's white or not, now they're on a rampage!"

This veiled warning was enough for Rick. He ran to Ruddy and urged the dog inside the cabin. Chot and the two men followed, and the door was at once shut.

But even then the sound of the booming drum seemed to come nearer.

"Hadn't we better put out the lights?" suggested Rick, for two lanterns were burning inside the cabin.

"A good idea," agreed Captain Tod. "I'll douse them. Is your gun loaded, Slithers?"

The buck-toothed man made no answer, and he seemed to be fumbling over his weapon with fingers that plainly trembled. He could hardly hold the rifle.

Rick and Chot looked at one another in surprise as Uncle Tod put out one lantern and reached for the other. Ruddy began to whine and whimper, as he crouched at Rick's feet. Plainly the setter was getting worried and alarmed at these strange preparations; and he was not a bull nor an airedale, with their fight-

ing instincts. At best Ruddy was but a hunter of birds, rather a timid dog take him all in all.

Nor was Ruddy the only one in that cabin who was afraid. For it became more and more evident that the buck-toothed man was exhibiting signs of cowardice.

"You take that window, and I'll take this one," said Captain Tod, indicating a front opening for himself and a rear one for his partner. "Most likely they'll come at us from two sides at once."

"I thought it was agin' th' law to let Indians have guns," said Mr. Slither, weakly complaining.

"So it is," agreed the skipper. "It's also against the law for them to start any of this war drum business—but that doesn't *stop* 'em. Get to your window! Keep back, boys!"

As he spoke there came a burst of that weird booming from the black woods. The throbbing sound was much nearer now, and Rick, not exactly obeying his uncle's wish, crept to an end window and looked out.

The moon was just then showing through some clouds, and by its fitful light the boy saw, stalking amid the trees, some figures that

seemed quite gigantic to his excited imagination. One, he felt sure, was Old Johnnie Green—he could see that protruding stomach, and he recalled the old pagan's invitation to "kick um hard—two bits!"

Again the drum boomed out, this time so distinctly that there could be no doubt it was beaten by some one near at hand. There was now no light in the cabin, but by the moonbeams that streamed in Rick and Chot could see their uncle at one window, his gun thrust out, while Slither was creeping toward the one he had been asked to defend.

And then, as the drum boomed out another warning there accompanied the throbbing a weird and nerve-racking yell—if not a war whoop of the old, terrifying, Indian days at least a good imitation.

Slither dropped his gun, and emitted a yell as he fled into the room where he slept, crying:

"Don't fight 'em, Cap'n! Don't fight 'em! Let's surrender an' maybe they'll spare our lives! Don't fight 'em!"

If ever there was a man afraid and terrified Buck-Tooth Slither was that individual!

CHAPTER XIX

OFF FOR HELP

DIFFICULT it would be to say who was the most surprised over this action on the part of one of their number—Rick, Chot or Captain Tod. All of them, of course, never expected anything like this—that Slither would show the white feather in the face of seeming danger.

And yet that is just what he had apparently done. He had dropped his gun, and had hidden himself in a safe inner room, and that before a shot had been fired; for, as yet, no actual attack had been made by the Indians. The booming of the drum continued, and an occasional wild and weird shout brought forth low howls of protest from Ruddy, crouching at Rick's side. But there was no firing on the part of the enemy.

"Slither! Come back here!" ordered Captain Tod.

The only answer from the darkened inner

room was a sort of groan, and then a whimpering voice added:

"No! No! Don't let's fight 'em! Let's surrender! They won't scalp us, maybe, and we can get away! Let's give up!"

"Give up? I guess not!" roared Captain Tod. "We'll fight if we have to. Of course I shan't fire first, but I'm not going to give up. This land belongs to me and—"

"Some of it's mine!" broke in Slither.

"Well, not the part you claim as your share," snapped out the skipper. "We'll have to settle that between us later. But I'm not going to get out just because these Indians beat a drum. Get your gun and fight!"

"No! No!" whined the buck-toothed man. "I—I can't fight!"

And, to tell the shameful truth, he could not. He was a physical coward and his nerves had given way. I doubt if he could have held a gun without letting the muzzle weave all over, with more danger to those in the cabin than those outside.

"I'll take his gun!" exclaimed Rick.

"Let me! Or get me another!" pleaded Chot.

Captain Tod was muttering under his breath, and it need not be doubted that he was righteously reviling his cowardly partner. For a time he turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the boys, and it was only when Rick came out of Slither's room with the gun that the skipper, looking from the window, out into the now brilliantly moonlit woods, exclaimed.

"I guess we won't have to fight. They're going away!"

"Who, the Indians?" asked Chot.

"Yes. They're going back. Guess they only did this for a warning. They didn't fire a shot! They're going back!"

As he ceased speaking the shouts of those outside the cabin grew less, and the booming of the drum died away. The Indians were marching back through the forest to their slab and log cabins in the Reservation. No harm had yet come to those of Long River Camp. But what the future held no one could say.

Waiting for a time, to make sure none of the Indians were hiding outside, Captain Tod relighted the lanterns. Then, with a stern look on his face, he strode to the door of the room

where Slither had retreated, and, flinging open the door he cried:

"Come on out—you skunk! I'm sorry to use such language but I have to," apologized the skipper to the boys.

"Have they agreed to—to spare us?" faltered the buck-toothed man.

"Spare us? Why, you rat, they aren't going to touch us! They're gone! Dear me! There I go again! Calling names!" sighed the Captain. "Yes, Slither, they're gone."

"Oh, thank goodness for that! I guess they saw we—we were ready for 'em, and they didn't dare attack us! Oh, I'm so glad they've gone! Are you sure they won't come back, skipper?"

"No, I'm not sure of anything, except that you're a rank coward, and that I'm sorry I ever had anything to do with you!" snapped out Uncle Tod. "They saw 'we' were ready, did they? Where do you get that 'we'? You weren't ready; not by a long shot!"

"I—I couldn't help it, cap'n! Indians always did make me nervous, especially at night. I can fight 'em in the day time, but not

at night. I—I get so nervous!” explained Slither.

“Hum! Nerves are a good thing to lay it to!” snorted the skipper. “Well, you needn’t be nervous any more to-night. They’ve gone!”

“I—I’m glad of that!” faltered Slither. “If they’ll only come back in the morning—when I can see what I’m doing—I’ll show ’em what I’m made of! That’s what I will!” he boasted.

“Don’t!” dryly advised Mr. Tod. “Indians don’t like cowards any more than I do. Don’t show ’em what you’re made of—chicken livers, I should say!” he added contemptuously.

“Well, it’s only because it’s at night,” whiningly explained the partner. “I can fight daytimes all right. You’ll see if they come back in the morning!”

“Well, they most likely will,” commented the skipper, to the no small delight of Rick and Chot, who were really eager and anxious to get into action.

“Do—do you think so?” faltered the buck-toothed man. “Will they come back?”

“Of course they will!” cried the skipper. “And the next time there’ll be some shooting, sure!”

Rick and Chot wanted to cry "hurray!" but they did not think it would be just the proper thing to do. As for Slither—he merely groaned, which might mean anything.

"Well, the danger's over, for the time being," went on Captain Tod. "I was afraid the Indians were up to some doings. Old Johnnie Green has been acting queer lately."

"He was all right when we saw him," ventured Rick.

"When did you see him?" quickly asked his uncle.

"This afternoon. We went down to the reservation. He offered to let us kick him for two bits!"

"His old trick; eh?" Well, probably he didn't want you to get suspicious. But he's been planning this raid for a long time. He doesn't like the whites. There'll be trouble in the morning—real trouble!" predicted the skipper of the *Sallie*.

"You think so?" asked Slither.

"I'm sure of it!"

"Then we have a chance to get away now—while it's dark," suggested the buck-toothed man. "Let's go!" and he started for the door.

"Not much!" cried the skipper. "This is my claim, and—"

"Don't forget I own part," interjected Mr. Slither.

"But you don't own the part you say you do!" cried the skipper. "I'll fight for my rights. And I'm not going to sneak off and let the Indians take possession. Once they get possession it will be hard to oust them, even if we have the law with us. Possession is nine points of the law, you know. I'm going to stick."

"Well, then I will too. I can always fight better by daylight," asserted Mr. Slither.

This was not saying very much, the boys thought.

"We'll have to stand watch and watch to-night," decided Captain Tod, when it became certain that the Indians had departed. "I don't believe they'll come back again before morning, but there's no telling. We must keep watch."

This just suited the boys, and Rick and his chum now forgot all about the queer actions of the skipper, they forgot all about Hokum Driscoll and his freak show, and Rick even let

slip from his mind worry over the fact that he had heard nothing from his folks about the letter he had sent them, speaking of the possibility of Uncle Tod being insane.

Certainly the skipper appeared all right now, though he was a bit excited, as, indeed, they all were. But he showed no signs of being out of his mind, as he arranged for each one, in turn, to keep watch during certain hours of darkness.

At their own request Rick and Chot were allowed to sit up and take the first watch—until midnight—together. They declared they were not sleepy, and could not sleep if they turned in, though they might doze off if obliged to take the last half of the night.

So it was arranged that they should be joint sentries, turning the latter half of the night over to Captain Tod and Slither, who would divide it between them.

“And don’t hesitate to fire if you see anything the least suspicious,” cautioned the skipper as he left Rick and Chot, each with a gun, while the two men prepared to go to bed. The boys knew how to handle firearms, that being one of the things they had been taught by their Scout Master.

It was with no small sense of importance that Rick and Chot, with Ruddy near them, of course, prepared to keep watch in the cabin. They had never expected anything like this when they started out on the cruise with Captain Tod. They knew there were Indian reservations out west, and on the Mexican border where, occasionally, the red men revolted and went on shooting expeditions. But that the comparatively quiet tribes of one of the middle Atlantic states would do this never entered their heads. And yet Old Johnnie Green and his pagan followers did seem to be on the "war path."

Naturally Rick and Chot started at every sound, and more than once they were on the verge of firing at what, after a closer inspection, proved to be only shadows of the night. They sat at the windows, with strained and tense nerves, while the two men slept in their bunks.

"There's a storm brewing," said Rick in a low voice, when it was nearly midnight.

"What makes you think so?" asked Chot, who found himself trying to fight off sleep.

"I can see lightning across the river, the

moon is partly clouded over and—listen to the thunder.”

“Sure it isn’t the Indian drum?” asked Chot, rousing himself.

“No, it’s thunder!”

And it was—both boys agreed as to that. Chot now also saw the distant flashes. The wind began to sigh mournfully through the trees, and the moon had gone completely under the clouds, leaving the woods in pitchy blackness.

“If the Indians wanted to sneak up now it would be a good chance,” suggested Chot in a low voice.

“Yes,” Rick agreed. “I can’t see a thing! It’s like looking into a barrel of tar!”

The boys were somewhat glad when Captain Tod came from his room, announcing that he would take the watch now. Not that Rick and Chot would not have remained on duty had it been necessary, but their trick was ended, and they were glad to turn in.

As they dozed off they could hear the wind howling around the cabin and a little later the dashing of heavy rain against the windows and on the roof told that the storm had broken.

"It's a bad night," muttered Captain Tod, as he took his place on guard duty. "I don't believe the Indians will venture out now."

Rick and Chot did not hear him for they had gone to sleep. How long they slumbered they did not know, but they were both suddenly awakened by the report of a shot, seeming to come from within the cabin. At the same time Ruddy barked loudly, and there was a yell from Slither.

"What's the matter?" shouted Rick, leaping out of his bunk.

The voice of the buck-toothed man answered:

"Your uncle's been shot!"

"Shot!" echoed Chot, joining his chum.

They saw the skipper sitting in a chair holding his right wrist in his left hand. Blood was dripping down on the floor, and the captain's gun lay near a little pool of red.

"Did they get you?" asked Rick, pointing to the window where fitful lightning could be seen.

"No, it wasn't the Indians. My gun slipped and went off by accident. I—I guess some one of you will have to go for a doctor," said the

skipper faintly. "The nearest one is down in the village, ten miles away."

"I'll go in the motor boat!" offered Rick.
"Chot and I! We can run it!"

"No—you can't," spoke his uncle, trying not to show the pain he felt. "The engine is out of order. It's broken, I need a new part to put it in shape. You'll have to go by canoe. The dinghy leaks."

"I can paddle!" offered Rick.

"So can I!" added Chot.

"One of you boys better stay with me," suggested Slither. "I can't look after you, skipper, an' fight the Indians too, if they come back in th' mornin'! One of you boys better stay with me!"

"You stay, Chot!" suggested Rick. "Ruddy and I will go for help! Just wait till I get a few more clothes on."

"Take your rubber coat," murmured the injured skipper. "It's raining cats and dogs. Yes, Chot had better stay here! You go for the doctor, Rick—you and Ruddy!"

CHAPTER XX

A WILD NIGHT

SLIPPING and stumbling along the wet and steep path that led down to the river, followed by the faithful Ruddy, Rick made his way toward the stream where floated the canoe in which he must make his lonely trip for the doctor. The storm was increasing in violence, with vivid flashes of lightning stabbing through the black trunks of trees, that glistened in the glare with the deluge of rain. And following each flash was crashing thunder which brought dismal howls from Ruddy, for, while he was a dog eminently suited for his mission in life, he did not care for a storm. Still he went wherever Rick went.

"It is a rough night, old fellow!" murmured the lad in sympathy with his canine chum. "But we can stand it, I reckon."

This talking, perhaps the tone of voice more than the words, seemed to make Ruddy feel better. He no longer howled at the thunder



"Stumbling along the wet and steep path that led down to the river."

crashes, though at times he whined pitifully.

"I'm glad I have this rubber coat," thought Rick, as he slipped and slid along, "I hope Uncle Tod doesn't bleed to death. I ought to have told them about winding something around his arm to stop the bleeding—like we learned at the Scout meeting. But I guess Chot will think of that. He got his honors in first aid. Uncle Tod may know about it himself—or Slither—"

Rick came to a halt in the rain and darkness, shaking his head.

"You can't count on Slither!" he mused. "He's yellow! But I guess Uncle Tod and Chot will know what to do. Anyhow I mustn't lose any time. I've got to get to the doctor's!"

It was some little walk from the cabin down to the river where the motor boat and canoe were tied fast, and the way was made doubly long and hard in the pelting rain and in the wind which, at times, threatened to blow Rick off his feet.

Once, as he passed beneath a tree, there was an ominous crack, and the boy and his dog leaped aside just in time, for a big, rotten

branch crashed down right where they had been passing on the path a moment before.

"That was a lucky escape!" murmured Rick, as a flash of lightning revealed the big limb on the ground.

It was so dark, except when the fitful gleams of sky-electrics flashed, that Rick could not see his way, confused as he was by being suddenly awakened from a sleep, after only a short doze following several hours of tense vigil. Then, too, he was worried and alarmed over the mysterious Indian uprising.

"I wonder if they'll try to stop me from going after help?" thought the boy. "If they have any sense, though, they'll stay in their shacks on a night like this!"

It was, in very truth, a wild night, and growing wilder. As Rick stumbled along, his thoughts in spite of all he could do reverting to the possibility of an Indian attack on himself. Suddenly he felt his feet jerked from beneath him, and he fell at full length, accidentally kicking Ruddy as he went down. The dog howled.

Rick could not restrain a yell, not exactly of fear but of alarm, and he tried to scramble up to defend himself. But a moment later, as a

most vivid flash preceded a nerve-rendering crash, he saw that he was alone in the woods. A piece of wild grape vine had tripped him, and he had fallen heavily. His alarm was needless.

"Well, nothing broken," he murmured, as he arose, and patted Ruddy who came nosing around him. "That's lucky! It wouldn't be any joke to have to lie out here with a broken leg, while Uncle Tod was waiting for me to bring him help. Where is that river and canoe, anyhow?"

Well might he ask this, for he seemed all turned around in the woods. The path appeared to have been washed away by the torrent of rain that was falling, and Rick could only guess where it extended through the trees, using his previous knowledge of its location as a guide.

"If I could hear the river I could find it better," he said as he steadied himself against a tree, after arising from his tumble.

There were rapids, foaming amid rocks not far from the camp, and on still nights the ceaseless murmur of the stream was borne to the ears of our friends. But now the patter of

rain and the crash of thunder drowned out all other sounds.

"I've just got to keep on! mused Rick.

He was somewhat bruised and lame from his fall, and he had to limp slightly as he forced himself onward. He was wet through in spots, too, for the rubber coat was but scant protection in that driving rain and whipping wind, flapping open every now and again.

But Rick was of the Boy Scouts—not a quitter—and he had no idea of giving up. It would take many more hard knocks than those he had already received to turn him back. Besides, there was urgent need of getting help to Captain Tod. Rick did not like to remember the look on his uncle's face, nor the sight of that grim red pool on the cabin floor near the rifle.

"I wonder if I am going right?" thought Rick a little later, when he had proceeded some distance along the path, and it did not appear to slope downward as he knew it ought if it was to lead him to the stream, which was below the camp. "Ruddy, what about it?" he asked the dog. "Where's the river?"

Buddy came to a halt, looked back at his

master, and in the next flash of lightning that came Rick could see the tail wagging.

"Go on to the river, Ruddy! The river—boat—fish! Lead the way!"

Rick knew he could trust to the intelligence of his pet. On other distressful occasions Ruddy had brought help, or gone for it, and, in a sense, the dog knew the meaning of the word boat. For he had often been directed to get in or out of one of the craft moored at the camp dock. And so, trusting now to Ruddy's previous memory, Rick hoped the dog could lead the way to the river. For the senses of the setter, especially his smell, but not his sight, were keener than Rick's. A dog, except perhaps in rare instances, has nothing like as good eye sight as has a man. But a dog's keenness of scent is often marvelous, and his sense of direction unfailing.

So it was on these instincts of Ruddy that Rick knew he could depend. If Ruddy could only lead him down to the river, without too much delay, all might yet be well. True there was a long paddle to the village after the doctor, but Rick was not afraid of that. He knew how to handle a canoe, though, as he learned later, he

underestimated the power and fury of Long River in a storm.

"Go on, Ruddy! Go on—down to the river—to the boat!" called Rick, wiping the water from his face and eyes.

With a bark of understanding, Ruddy started on again, Rick following as best he could. Slipping, sliding and stumbling, more than once falling down, bruising himself, now almost soaking wet but never giving up, the lad kept on, and finally he emerged from the darkness of the woods and into a clearing, whence, as the next flash came, he had a sight of the river.

"Now for the boat!" cried Rick. He could fairly well see what he was doing now, being out of the woods, for the lightning came at close intervals, and soon he was at the dock where the *Sallie* was tied up.

"Pity I can't take her," thought Rick. "I'd like to get under some shelter. But if she's busted there's no use trying. Now for the canoe. It will be faster and easier to handle than the dinghy."

He went around to the other side of the dock, where the smaller craft was kept, confidently expecting to reach down and get hold of the

canoe painter. But, to his surprise, the rope came up unresistingly in his hand. It was fast to no craft.

And the next flash that came showed him the frayed ends of the cable. The canoe had broken loose in the storm! Anxious glances up and down the stream showed, under the fitful glare of the lightning, only a deserted waste of bubbling, rushing, storm-tossed and rain-pelted water.

CHAPTER XXI

ANXIOUS HOURS

RICK had no more than closed the door behind himself and Ruddy, as he let himself out into the storm to go for help, than Captain Tod, never letting go of the bleeding arm where he held it with his left hand, grimly remarked:

“Something’s got to be done!”

To Chot it was not as alarming as might seem at first. He was a lad who had often been camping with his Boy Scout friends, and, more than once, there had been accidents. Indeed he recalled the Scout Master using these very words on an occasion when a member of the Scouting party had cut himself quite badly.

“What—what can we do?” faltered Mr. Slither. “We got to have a doctor, an’ Rick’s gone for him.”

“Something’s got to be done before then, if

"I'm not to bleed to death," said Uncle Tod.

"I know!" cried Chot. "We've got to put one of those twisty things on your arm—a to—tor—"

"Tourniquet—that's it!" finished Captain Tod. "You know how to make one?" He looked from one to the other of his companions, while the wind howled around the cabin and the rain beat fiercely upon it.

"Is it—is it something you take inside—to stop the bleeding?" asked the buck-toothed man, helplessly.

"Might have known you wouldn't be able to do anything!" exclaimed the skipper contemptuously.

"I know how to make one!" cried Chot. "Mr. Taylor, our Scout Master, showed us how. I'll make one!"

Which he did, using a piece of an old shirt to form a wide band, that would not cut too deeply into the flesh of the captain's arm. When this had been put in place, with a piece of wood wrapped in cloth to press on the severed artery, Chot slipped a short length of a tree branch in the loop of the bandage, and twisted it until the skipper winced with pain.

"Does it hurt?" asked Chot in a low voice.

"Some. But you've got to hurt me to save my life, I reckon. Twist away!"

And Chot twisted until the tourniquet had done its work and the bleeding was almost checked. The power of the blood to coagulate, or thicken itself, would do the rest, provided Captain Tod remained quiet. Chot realized this, for he said:

"You must lie down just where you are, and don't move!"

"I don't feel much like moving, just now," said the skipper with a wan smile. "Lucky you knew how to put that bandage on. If you'll bring out another chair I can make out to rest here, I guess."

Fixing an improvised bed was something Slither could do, at least, and he and Chot soon had the captain as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, not daring to move him much.

Then, as the storm grew worse, and it became evident that sleep was out of the question, even had any of the three felt capable of it, Chot blew up the fire and made some coffee, which

was most grateful to all of them, particularly the captain.

"Mighty careless of me—to shoot myself," he said, when a little color had come back to his cheeks.

"How did it happen?" asked Chot.

"Well, I reckon I must have dozed off a little while I was sitting there—waiting for the Indians to come back," and Chot wondered whether it really happened, or whether he fancied he saw a ghost of a smile on the skipper's face as he mentioned the Indians. "Anyhow," Rick's uncle went on, "I felt my gun slipping. I made a grab for it, and must have done something I hadn't ought to have done, for she went off and the bullet tore through my arm."

"It's a wonder it didn't blow half your arm off, if you was as close to the muzzle as all that," observed Slither.

"It wasn't a direct shot," the captain explained. "I was wondering, myself, why there weren't powder marks on me. But I looked and saw that the bullet hit the stove, glanced back and struck me. You can see where it hit the stove."

The mark was there, plainly enough. At first Chot had an idea there might be something the captain was trying to conceal, and he dwelt on this for some moments.

The lad had half a notion that perhaps, after all, some Indian might have sneaked up to the window, thrust his rifle in and so have fired at the captain seated in his chair. For there was the smell of powder inside the cabin when they rushed out following the loud report.

But there was no break in the window, which had not been open, and this, with the captain's explanation, and the piece chipped off the stove, sufficiently explained matters.

"But why did he smile when he mentioned the Indians?" Chot wondered. However that explanation was to come later.

"We've got to wait now for Rick to come back," observed Mr. Tod, when the first excitement had worn away, and he was feeling more comfortable, though the tight tourniquet on his arm was painful. "He ought to be able to get back here with the doctor by forenoon."

"Not before then?" asked Chot.

"No, for it's ten miles or more, and he'll have his own trouble on the river in the canoe this

night. It sure is wild! I wish I hadn't let him go," and the captain looked apprehensively at the windows which rattled in the fury of the storm's blast.

"Oh, Rick knows how to handle a boat—especially a canoe," said Chot. "He and I have gone out on the bay in one when it was rougher than this."

"Yes, but there isn't a swift current in the bay, as there is in the river," objected the skipper. "I wish I hadn't let him go—and yet—"

He looked at Slither, but said nothing. That individual was taking more bread and coffee.

"There may not be a current in the bay," admitted Chot, "but there's a tide, which is worse."

"That's so," agreed the skipper more cheerfully. "Perhaps Rick will be all right after all. I hope so."

"Could I go anywhere around here and get help?" asked Chot, after an anxious period of silence, broken only by the howl of the wind and the dash of the rain.

"No, lad, there isn't a doctor any nearer than the one Rick has gone after," said the skipper.

"I s'pose the Indians know something about looking after folks that get hurt," suggested Chot. "But we couldn't ask them now—when they're on a rampage."

"No, I wouldn't like to ask them," said the captain. "They're so dirty I might get blood poisoning from them, and—"

"Besides we wouldn't want 'em to know how weakened we are—nobody to shoot at 'em when they come back at daylight but you and me, Chot!" interrupted Buck-Tooth Slither quickly.

"Yes, that's right," agreed the skipper, and again there was that peculiar half smile on his face.

What could it mean?

"I'll be ready for 'em when they come back after sun-up," declared the partner. "I don't like night fighting. But when it's daylight I'll hold my own with anybody."

"Glad to hear you say that," commented the skipper, dryly.

"You—you called me names a while ago," went on the owner of the buck teeth. "But I forgive you, Tod. I'll show you how I can fight when daylight comes—if it ever does," he added whiningly.

"Oh, morning's bound to come," cheerfully said Chot. "But it won't be light very early with all this storm."

"It's a hum-dinger!" was Slither's opinion. "Regular hum-dinger. Couldn't be worse!"

All night long the three sat in the lonely cabin, while the wind increased in fury outside, lashing the rain against the roof and sides, and the vivid lightning flashed as the vibrating thunder shook the very ground beneath them.

"I wonder how Rick's making out?" said Chot, musingly, after a period of grim silence.

"I wonder, too," said the skipper, softly.

Buck-Tooth Slither took more bread and coffee, remarking:

"Reckon I'll fry a bit of bacon. I'm gettin' hungry."

Graually the blackness of the night faded, but the gray dawn was of the grayest, for the sky was overcast with thick clouds. The lightning and thunder gradually ceased, but the rain and wind kept up.

Chot went to the window to look out. He could not see much for the glass was covered with pelting drops, chasing each other down

to the sill. But what he did see caused him to exclaim in alarm.

“Here comes Old Johnnie Green!” he cried.

“The Indian?” gasped Mr. Slither. “The Indians?”

“Yes, and Johnnie’s got a lot more with him!”

The buck-toothed man gave one howl, upset the pan of bacon he was frying into the open stove and bolted out of the back door into the rain.

CHAPTER XXII

IN ROUGH WATER

UNAWARE of the events taking place back at Uncle Tod's cabin, though he guessed his friends must be anxiously waiting for his return, Rick, when he looked and saw the canoe gone, felt a sudden, momentary sense of terror. What was he to do—how could he go for help without some craft in which to navigate the river? The doctor, Uncle Tod had told him, lived several miles down stream. Of course it was possible to go there by a land route, but it was longer, Rick did not know the way and in the darkness and storm it was almost out of the question.

"The river is my only chance, Ruddy," said Rick, speaking to his dog as he often did. "But how can I make it without the canoe?"

Ruddy whined in answer, and crept closer to his young master for shelter—and a warm shelter would have been a most welcome thing

to have in that storm, for though it was summer the rain was cold.

"There ought to be some sort of a boat around here," mused Rick. He tried to remember whether there was or not, and while gathering his wits together—for he was still in a sort of daze—he crept in the lee of the motor boat, where, for a space, he and Ruddy were sheltered from the worst of the blast and rain.

"If only you hadn't gone back on us, *Sallie*," spoke the boy, leaning against the cabin of the craft, and trying to get as much as possible away from the rain. "If only you had stuck to us I could be in you, now, going down stream in comfort after the doctor. The dinghy, too, she had to leak! But I reckon it was to be this way."

Rick was a sort of philosopher you see, making the best of things.

He had half a notion, then, of getting into the *Sallie* and letting her drift down stream, since that was the direction in which he wanted to travel. There seemed to be enough current in the river so that with it and the wind he would have steerage way.

"But something might happen in the rapids,"

Rick told himself. "Then I'd pile her on the rocks and I'd be worse off than I am now. I've just got to get some kind of a boat! I'll look along shore for a while. If the Reservation land only came down here, some of the Indians might have a boat." But the remnant of the once powerful tribe was located some distance from the river, and if any of them did have a fishing craft on the stream the boat was probably so old and leaky that it would not have been safe to use it, Rick reasoned.

To locate his uncle's canoe was his only chance the boy thought, and with this end in view he started down stream, since it was evident that when the canoe broke loose in the storm it would be borne downward.

But Rick had only gone a short distance away from the partial shelter of the *Sallie* than he turned back, and, speaking to Ruddy, he said;

"Might as well take the paddles with me. If I do manage to find the canoe I won't have to come back for them. I'll just pretend I'm surely going to locate that canoe. Maybe it will bring me luck!"

Rick was also a sort of optimist you see, as well as a philosopher.

The canoe paddles were kept hidden under the dock, and it did not take Rick long to dig them out from among the leaves and forest rubbish that was generally tossed over them better to screen them from prying eyes. Then with the two broad blades under his arm (he took two for fear one might break if he was so lucky as to get started) he again began his tramp through the storm.

"Of course there are just as many chances that the canoe will lodge on the other side of the river as on my side," thought Rick, as he fought his way through the driving rain and fierce wind along the camp bank of the now turbulent stream. "But the current sets in this way, I've heard Uncle Tod say, and maybe the canoe will be caught in some eddy and lodged on shore where I can get it. I hope so, anyhow."

The thunder and lightning seemed to be getting less now, though there were no signs of the storm abating. However Rick was thankful for this small favor, since the flashing of the lightning, while it gave too much light for short intervals, made it twice as dark the next, when the flash died away, and Rick was con-

tinually stepping into mud holes or bruising himself against trees and stumps.

"If it would quit my eyes would get used to the dark and I could get along better," the boy reflected.

So he was glad when the sky artillery finally ceased, and he could walk on in the rain, the wind and darkness. But, as he had said, his eyes becoming accustomed to the blackness were now of better service to him, even though it was as murky as the inside of a tar barrel.

Every now and then, as he progressed along the river bank, (at times actually stumbling into shallow parts of the stream where the sudden deluge had caused it to overflow its banks,) Rick stooped down and looked for the canoe. It was a bit lighter over the water than on shore and he thought he might see the outlines of the stranded craft against the river line.

But for an hour or more he stumbled on without any success, though more than once he felt his heart beating faster as he thought he caught a glimpse of the craft. Once it was a dead tree that had floated down the river and lodged against the bank. Another time it actually was

a boat, but one stove in, and so broken that to use it was out of the question.

All the while the wind howled around him, the rain beat in his face and he was all but completely soaking wet, for the rain coat blew open at times, letting in the driving rain blown as it was by twisting gusts of wind.

Still Rick had not the faintest idea of giving up, and Ruddy, though at times he whined to show that he did not at all like this wild outing, kept close to his master.

"We'll get there sometime or other, old dog!" stoutly declared the boy.

And Ruddy barked his delight at hearing Rick's voice. For there is nothing dogs like better than being talked to. They want human companionship and to hear human voices as much as does a homesick exile on a desert island.

And then, just when Rick was about to give up, and when he was beginning to think he had better strike inland, search out some farm house if he could find one and beg for help, luck unexpectedly turned his way. He came to a cove in the river—a cove where a deep eddy set in—and as this was, he felt, a most likely place

for the drifting canoe to have lodged, he made a more careful search than usual.

There came a lull in the storm—a moment when the wind seemed to die away and the rain to cease its pelting drive—and Rick saw, tangled in a mass of underbrush on shore, the outline of what could be nothing else but a canoe.

“I hope it isn’t busted!” he cried as he made his way toward it.

It was not easy work to drag the canoe closer to him through the tangle of tree branches and bushes, but at last he managed it, and having turned the craft over, to empty out the water, he was delighted to find that it was sound, as far as he could tell in the darkness.

“If she leaks I’ll just have to bail, that’s all—with my cap,” mused Rick. He placed the paddles in the bottom, called to Ruddy to get in, took his place on the after seat of the frail craft and pushed off with one foot over the side.

“I’ll need to keep the bow as much out of water as I can, for the river sure is rough,” reflected the boy, as he dug the paddle in and swung out into the stream.

And it was not until he was well out toward

the middle, and away from the comparatively peaceful eddy, that he realized the full force of the storm and the turbulence of the stream to which he had trusted himself and his dog.

But there was no turning back. He must go on to bring help to Uncle Tod.

Rick's life in a seacoast town had taught him more about boats and their management than most boys of his age would have known. And so, though he was a bit frightened when he saw how rough was the water, and when he felt the full force of the wind, it was only for a moment that he had any fear. Then his Boy Scout training, and his own sturdy character, together with the presence of Ruddy in the canoe with him, gave him back his courage.

I think, even in the utmost danger, any one is better for having a dog with him for a dog seems to know and understand, and, at times, almost to talk to one. He stands by you to the last, if he is any kind of a dog at all; and Ruddy was in this class.

"We've got our work cut out for us, old fellow!" said Rick to his dog, as the canoe dipped up and down in the current, a foam-crested wave, showing dirty white in the dark-

ness, now and then slapping against the up-raised bow and spilling some of the river inside the craft.

If the wind had been blowing in the same direction as that in which the river was flowing Rick's voyage in the canoe would not have been so risky. But the gale blew up stream and the current was dead against it, so that with the wind catching his body, as if it had been a sail, Rick lost the advantage the current would have otherwise have given him, and he actually had to paddle down stream to make progress.

Normally there was not much of a current in this part of Long River, though it flowed swiftly enough in the narrow gorge where the ugly rocks raised their black masses up through the white water. And as he thought of this stretch Rick felt a bit uneasy. Still his luck might hold.

The village toward which he was now headed, where the nearest doctor lived, was just below this stretch of rapids, and Rick was almost tempted to go ashore before reaching the danger spot to perform the rest of the journey on foot.

"But I'll lose time if I try that," he told him-

self. "I reckon I can make the rapids. I've steered the *Sallie* through them more than once. Of course a canoe is different, but I've got to take the chance."

Through the darkness and storm he guided the frail canoe, and once, when he reached a quiet stretch of water he had to stop and bail, for there was so much of the river water and rain aboard that the canoe was getting loggy. Then he went on again, now and then speaking an encouraging word to Ruddy, who whined in answer.

Gradually morning came, though Rick hardly recognized the daylight so dense and gray was it. The wind and rain still kept up, and then there gradually was borne to the ears of the lad a roaring sound.

"The rapids!" he exclaimed. "Now I'm in for it! Stick by me, Ruddy!"

He need have no fear—Ruddy would stick!

A moment later Rick was fighting his way through rough water.

CHAPTER XXIII

WRECKED

RICK had not been battling his course through the rapids of Long River more than a few minutes, in that stress of wind and weather, when he felt that he had made a mistake in trying to pass through this stretch of rough water. As the somewhat uncertain light of the morning grew through the storm, he could see, just below him, the small village where he expected to get the doctor.

"And I hope he has an auto that's in working order," thought Rick, as he desperately grasped his paddle and dug it in. "We never can navigate up the river, and a horse and wagon will be too slow over land. I do hope he has an auto!"

It was the first time since he had started that he had given anxious thought to actually getting back to Uncle Tod with medical aid. Up to now he had been fighting the elements so continuously that they occupied all his attention.

You who live in the cities, with telephones on every hand, by which magic you may summon aid of all sorts, have no idea how desperate is sometimes the case in country districts that are sparsely settled. Of course many country places have telephones, or there are autos available, but at Long River camp there were none of these things. Rick had to fight his way unaided.

And a hard battle he knew it was going to be as soon as he felt himself within the grip of the pulling, white water of the rapids. The wind had died out a little, though it was raining as hard as ever, and almost the full force of the swift stream, swollen as it was by hundreds of brooks pouring their overflow into it, was acting to drive the canoe onward.

"I've got to try to work her toward shore," thought Rick, as he saw himself nearing the village. The town appeared to be deserted. None of the inhabitants were up this early, or, if any were, they kept to their homes.

But when Rick tried to guide his craft over toward the nearest river bank, on his left, he found that it was impossible. Paddle as he did—and of course he had not the strength of a man—he could make no progress. He was in

the middle of the current and it was bearing him straight onward in its rush.

Up and down bobbed the canoe, and Ruddy, though a dog of the sea, looked at his master in silent reproach. It was as though he accusingly asked what wrong he had done to be brought on this rough, wet voyage.

"Tough work, old scout!" cried Rick to Ruddy, gritting his teeth as he paddled hard. "Tough work but we've got to do it!"

He was opposite the small village now, dimly seen through the mist of the rain, and he was no nearer the river bank than before. He hoped there was some eddy into which he could guide his craft, but he remembered none.

"If only somebody would come out and help—throw me a rope or get a motor boat and come after me," thought poor Rick. "Then I could get ashore. But I guess I'm not going to make it! I'll have to land away below the rapids and walk back!"

And as the water became rougher, and all his paddling seemed to have no effect, Rick began to think he would be very lucky if he did land, several miles below the village where the doctor lived.

He scanned the rain-swept shore, but saw only a few small boats, none large enough to have come to his rescue. Doubtless the rapids were not so rough in calm weather, and could be more easily navigated.

"I wonder if I could make them hear me if I called?" mused the boy. "I'm going to try!"

He raised his voice in a shout, and to this Ruddy added his barks, but the noise of the storm must have carried the calls for help across the stream, away from the town, for no one answered.

And now a new danger or, rather, a series of them presented themselves to Rick. These were the black rocks of the river, some of them all but hidden by the foaming water. Others reared their black lengths high enough to be seen and avoided by a turn of the paddle, but more were submerged, and twice Rick felt the canoe bottom scrape over them with an ominous, grinding sound that made his breath gasp.

"If I hit a sharp one the canoe bottom will be ripped out—and then—good night!" grimly thought the boy. Still he fought on—he was not the kind to give up.

He resolved that his best chance lay in guiding the canoe clear of the rocks until it should reach quieter water so he might paddle ashore below the town.

With this end in view he gave no further thought to trying to reach the shore near the village. He gave his whole attention to keeping his craft off the rocks.

It was getting lighter now, though the storm seemed to be just as furious as when it had started. But the increased light enabled Rick to see more plainly. He peered through the mist of rain, now and then dashing the moisture from his eyes, and by an occasional dip of the paddle changing the course of the canoe to fend it off from some rock toward which he was born with great speed.

Several times he just scraped past jagged black stones, like the broken fangs of some wild beast reaching up to grasp him, canoe, dog and all. And three times more he felt that ominous rubbing sensation along the canoe bottom which told of her sliding over some flat, submerged boulder.

And then, after being swirled around a sudden turn in the river, the change in direction

nearly swamping his frail craft, Rick saw that he was headed straight toward a small, rocky island in mid-stream.

"There's going to be trouble!" mused the boy. "The current is sure to be swifter there, for the river is narrowed by the island. Guess I'll try to pass to the left—seems a bit wider there."

He was now caught in the grip of a faster current, being headed straight for jagged rocks that, with some stunted trees and vines, made up the little island. And, following his decision to pass on the left side of the obstruction, Rick tried to urge his craft in that direction.

But here his luck seemed to desert him. He was working desperately, and felt that he was about to pass the island, when the broad paddle blade snapped just where his left hand grasped it.

"Busted!" cried Rick, as he tossed overboard the shattered pieces. "Lucky I brought two!"

He reached back to get the spare paddle but, as he did so, a sudden shift in the wind, and a cross current, swept his craft directly upon the

jagged rocks that formed the upper apex of the island.

An instant later Rick and Ruddy were thrown out into the water as the canoe, split in twain, was completely wrecked on the rocks.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OWL-HEADED ROOSTER

RICK'S first effort, once he found himself in the water, was to rid himself of the rubber coat. It was like trying to swim with a bed quilt on his shoulders to attempt progress in it. Several times when he had been paddling Rick had removed the rubber garment in order to use his arms more freely in bailing. And then, as he felt cold and chilly, he had put it on again, though it was now little protection against the rain, for he had become soaked soon after leaving the cabin.

And, even as he slipped out of the coat, and watched it lodge on some of the island rocks, the lad's mind went back, in a flash, to Uncle Tod and those he had left to go and seek help.

"Guess he'll think I'm never coming back," mused Rick, as he struck out after his first immersion, when a quick glance showed Ruddy also swimming toward the island, not far distant.

“And I don’t see how I’m going to get any help now,” thought poor Rick, as parts of the broken canoe floated past him. “But I guess I’m lucky to be alive. Where are you, Ruddy?” he called, losing sight of his companion for a moment.

There was a bark and a whine, and Ruddy climbed out on the shore—a most inhospitable shore it seemed, for there was no sign of habitation on the island.

Rick followed his pet a moment later, and there stood boy and dog, tired, exhausted and dripping wet, while the rain continued to pour down most pitilessly on them.

“Well, we can’t stay here,” said Rick at last, as he wrung as much water as he could from his short coat, so that it would not be such a dragging weight on his shoulders. Then, seeing the rubber garment he had worn, caught on a rock near shore, Rick waded out a short distance and brought it back with him. “Maybe it will come in useful,” he said.

He had seen, several times before, the island on which he and Ruddy were now wrecked, for they had often passed it on trips up and down Long River in the *Sallie*. Ruddy knew it was

not inhabited, though there were one or two old shacks on it, where campers and fishermen sometimes stayed over night.

"And maybe I'll find some of them here now," thought the lad.

Then another idea came to him. He knew the river broadened out just below the island, where the rapids came to an end, and he had a notion he could swim across to the shore there, make his way back to the village, and summon the doctor for Uncle Tod.

With this end in view he and his dog started to walk the length of the narrow collection of rocks, earth, trees and bushes that made up Pickerel Island, as it was called from its resemblance to that fish.

As Rick expected, there was no one in the two shacks he visited, but in one he found an old coffee pot and some ground coffee. There was an ancient stove in the shack, and, by the greatest of good fortune, some wood—pieces of a packing box—that were comparatively dry.

"A fire and some hot coffee will put me in shape for a swim," mused Rick.

As a Boy Scout he had a water-proof match box which he always carried, and it was no

very difficult task to set some wood aglow in the old range. He then put the ground coffee in some water he dipped up at the river's edge in the rather leaky pot, and soon was enjoying a hot cup of the beverage which, to the half-exhausted lad, was the best breakfast he had tasted in many a day, as he said afterward. There were a few dishes in the shack, but of course no milk or sugar. Rick took his coffee plain, and was glad to get it.

"If only I had something for you, Ruddy!" he said regretfully.

But Ruddy could forage for himself, and this is just what he did, with the result that he unearthed a bone from a heap of refuse in one corner of the shack. Then, lying near the warm fire, Ruddy gnawed his breakfast, while Rick took more coffee.

The lad wished he might have remained in the shack long enough to have dried his garments, but he knew the need of haste, and only waiting long enough to get somewhat warmed after his cheering drink, he and the dog fared forth again toward the lower end of the island.

"Well, there's only one thing to do—swim for it," decided Rick, as he gazed across the

lonely mainland on either shore, and saw no sign of boat, habitation or other signs of help. "I'll swim over and walk back to the village to get the doctor."

Rick stripped himself of his coat, trousers and shoes. Then, clad in his light underwear, with his cap and other garments wrapped in the rubber coat, he looked about for a log, or piece of wood, to which he might tie his "baggage" in order to ferry it across.

"I think I'll have you tow it, Ruddy," he announced.

He found a piece of drift wood, bound the rubber coat with his clothing inside it to the broken plank, using some trailing wild grape vine as cords, and then, with a longer piece of vine as a rope, he hitched Ruddy to the improvised raft.

"All aboard! In we go!" cried Rick, plunging into the stream, after setting the laden driftwood craft afloat. Ruddy followed his master, towing the lad's garments. It did not matter that the water washed over them at times, for they were wet through anyhow.

Rick was glad he did not have to swim through the rapids, for he was so tired from



"Ruddy followed his master, towing the lad's garments."

his night of storm and effort that he felt he would not have been equal to the task. As it was, the waters below the island were quiet, though higher than usual, and after a not very hard swim, Rick and Ruddy landed on shore.

It was still raining hard, though not as cold as it had been during the night, but it was far from warm as Rick struggled and wiggled his way into his wet garments and put the rubber coat over them. He rather envied Ruddy, who had but to shake himself to get rid of most of the water that clung to his reddish coat.

"Well, let's go!" called Rick, when he had dressed himself.

Again they were on their way, their legs forming a more certain means of locomotion than had the canoe, though the effort was more tiring than paddling, or being carried along by the current.

Rick and Ruddy had landed in a lonely place, entirely out of sight of any human habitation. But a short distance from the river they reached a road that, except for the effects of the present storm, showed evidences of having been well traveled.

"I guess this will take us back to the village," said Rick aloud, as he and his dog tramped along it. "I hope so, anyhow."

Ruddy whined in understanding sympathy, and splashed along through the mud puddles beside his master. The hot coffee had given Rick new strength, and he was almost ready to whistle a tune when, as he neared a turn in the road, he suddenly heard the loud crowing of a rooster.

"Must be a house just ahead!" joyfully cried Rick, but when he rounded the turn all he saw was a large enclosed auto truck, or van, rumbling slowly along, having evidently just started off after a stop. And, to Rick's surprise the crow, sounding again, came from the van.

"Some farmer taking a load of chickens to market," thought the boy. "He'll give me a lift! I say there! Wait a minute!" he shouted as loudly as he could. And Ruddy, adding his bark to the boy's shouts helped make sufficient noise so that the driver of the van heard them. He stopped his vehicle, looked around from his sheltered seat in front, and then Rick gave a joyful cry.

"Mr. Driscoll!" exclaimed the lad. "Mr. Driscoll!"

"Rick and Ruddy!" was the response. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"I'm after a doctor!" hurriedly explained Rick. "Uncle Tod shot himself by accident. We were going to be attacked by the Indians!"

"Indians!" gasped Hokum Driscoll. "Indians!" He looked as incredulous as his voice sounded.

"Yes," Rick explained. "Old Johnnie Green and some of his gang started to beat the war drum and went on a rampage. I came down in a canoe to get a doctor for Uncle Tod, but I was wrecked on the island and had to swim to shore. Take me to the village as fast as you can."

"Of course!" agreed the freak showman. "I just had to change a tire, or you wouldn't have caught me. Your Uncle Tod shot himself; eh? Bad?"

"I don't know—it bled a lot. Chot and Mr. Slither are with my uncle."

"Who's Slither?"

"Uncle Tod's partner, but they don't get

along very well," remarked Rick, as he climbed up to the seat of the covered van, and helped Ruddy to a place beside them. "What are you doing?" he asked Mr. Driscoll.

"Collecting freaks, I'm going to start my show soon."

Again came that loud crow, from the interior of the van behind Rick.

"What's that?" asked the lad. "Have you—that can't be Esmeralda!"

"One of my best freaks," was the showman's smiling answer. "An owl-headed rooster! You ought to see him!"

CHAPTER XXV

UNCLE TOD'S VICTORY

JUST as he was about to reply, repeating the words "owl-headed rooster," Rick felt a sudden plucking at his shoulder. He turned his head to be confronted with a sight that made him slide to the far end limit of the seat where he was riding.

For, gazing at him through a ventilating hole in the front end of the van, was what seemed to be the head of an owl, with a ruffle of feathers and two queer feathery tufts that looked like ears. And as the owl head looked at Rick with yellow-rimmed eyes, the strong, pointed beak made another dig for his shoulder. Then came a loud crow that nearly deafened Rick, so near to his ear was it.

"Good land!" yelled the boy, as Ruddy barked in surprise. "What in—"

"There he is! My owl-headed rooster!" laughed Mr. Driscoll.

And it was that freak fowl that had nipped

Rick. A second look only seemed to bear out more strongly the illusion of an owl, even if the rooster's eyes, though of abnormal size, were not quite as large, nor as perfectly round as those of an owl.

"Where did you get him?" asked Rick, as again the odd fowl made another attempt to pick at him, failing in which, it crowed again.

"Oh, I heard that one of the farmers in this section had such a freak and I came after it," said Mr. Driscoll. "This isn't the one advertised in the Billboard, but another. "I've bought this auto van for just this sort of work—collecting freaks."

"Pretty big for just a lone rooster; isn't it?" asked Rick.

"Oh, I've got a five-legged cow inside," answered the showman. "I had to give her plenty of room."

"A five-legged cow!" exclaimed the lad.

"Yes, and she's a fine ballyhoo—better even than Tweedledum and Tweedledee, though those porcupines will draw good money. All I need now is a two headed alligator, but I don't want a fake one, and that's the only kind I've

come across so far. The cow, though, is genuine."

That she was alive was evidenced a moment later, for there came a loud "moo" from the interior of the van, mingling with the crowing of the owl-headed rooster, and producing a unique, traveling barnyard effect.

"I'll soon open my show, thanks to the start you and your uncle gave me," said Mr. Driscoll. "But I won't delay any further now, though there is a wild cat that some one has for sale just outside this town we're coming to. You want to get that doctor, I reckon."

"I sure do!" declared Rick. "Uncle Tod was bleeding badly when I left. The only doctor for miles around lives here. I hope he's home!"

"If he's wise he won't go far from it in a storm like this," said Mr. Driscoll, with grim humor.

"Could you take him and me back—and Ruddy too—in this auto?" asked Rick, determining on this bold request after a moment's thought. "That is if the doctor hasn't a car of his own."

"Sure I could!" declared Hokum Driscoll. "I aimed to do that!"

And when the doctor's home was reached he readily agreed to go back in the big van auto, for his own was not running any too well he said, though it was of a make universally used, and scarcely ever laid up.

"But don't you want to stay here at my house and get dried out?" the physician asked Rick, when he saw what state the boy was in. "My wife will look after you—and your dog," he added with a smile.

"Thank you, no, I'd better go back to Uncle Tod," said Rick. "And hadn't we better take some officers along, or police with guns. Those Indians—"

"Nonsense!" laughed Dr. Scott. "Old Johnnie Green and his whole tribe never intended any harm! They may have been doing one of their ceremonial dances, but they never raise a ruction or go on a rampage."

"They beat the war drum though!" cried Rick. "Uncle Tod said so!"

"Then I think he was trying to get up some excitement for your amusement," declared the physician. "I know Johnnie Green and his

'kick um hard—two bits!' I've known him for years. Depend on it, there was never any real danger!'"

Then Rick remembered the queer smile on his uncle's face. Did this explain it?

"Well, anyhow, Uncle Tod is shot!" the boy said.

"I haven't any doubt but what that's real enough," gravely admitted Dr. Scott, "and we'll fix him up as soon as we can. But those Indians—don't worry about them! Give 'em a good feed and they'd leave the war path in a moment—that is if they were ever on it; which I very much doubt."

And certainly there was no evidence of any Indian uprising when the big auto, splashing through the storm, finally reached Long River Camp with Rick and Ruddy, Dr. Scott, Mr. Driscoll and his two freaks. On the ride the showman explained to Rick that the *Pet* had been left several miles down the river while the freak-collecting trip inland was made by van.

Up to the cabin hurried Rick and Ruddy, followed by the others. As they neared the door it opened and Chot came out, relief showing on his face.

"How's Uncle Tod?" anxiously cried Rick.

"He's asleep," whispered Chot. "We stopped the bleeding and it didn't start up again. But I guess he needs the doctor all right."

They entered the cabin, the skipper awakening at their entrance.

"Hello, Rick," he murmured, rather sleepily, but in stronger tones than he had used directly after the accident. "Sorry I made you such a lot of work by my carelessness."

"Oh, I didn't mind," said Rick, though he was dead tired and still very wet.

"Where's Slither?" asked Rick, when the doctor had examined the captain's arm and pronounced the wound not as serious as had been feared. He soon had it bandaged, the bullet easily having been extracted. "Where's Slither?"

"Oh, he skipped out when Johnnie Green and the Indians came back beating the drum," answered Chot with a laugh, and Rick wondered at this laugh as he asked:

"Did the Indians come back?"

"Sure they came back," chuckled Captain

Tod, who was feeling much better now. "They came back just as I told them to."

"You *told* them to!" gasped Rick, and he noticed that Chot seemed to be in the amazing secret—for amazing it was when the skipper made that admission.

"Yes, I might as well tell the story, now that everything has come about the way I wanted it to, and Slither has cleared out," went on the captain. "There never was any Indian uprising, it was only a fake; and I even supplied the war drum—at least the skin heads for it, since the old ceremonial dance drum Johnnie Green owned for years was broken."

"You—you did that?" faltered Rick, hardly able to believe it.

"Yes, and I hope I didn't scare you lads any more than was needed," went on the skipper with another laugh, as he eased his bandaged arm. "I reckon I got the worst of the joke, too, with this bullet," he said. "But it had just the effect on Slither I intended it to have—it made him skip."

"When did he go?" asked Rick.

"Just about daybreak, when the Indians came back. I told them to come about then, though

I expected to be in shape to receive them myself. I didn't figure on my gun going off when I was asleep. That was my own fault. I shouldn't have left a load in—I didn't mean to. But things don't always work out the way you want them to."

Rick looked from his uncle to the others, surprise showing on the lad's face. He did not yet get more than a glimmer of what it was all about, and he had a faint suspicion that his relative might still be out of his mind—insane as Rick had feared more than once.

Captain Tod must have guessed what was passing in his nephew's thoughts for with a chuckle he said:

"I'm not crazy, Rick, though, as I said, crazy is as crazy does. And I purposely acted a bit crazy at times, to get Slither properly worked up."

"What was the trouble between you?" asked Rick, feeling that now an explanation would be made. And it came.

"Nick Slither is a rascal—nothing else," declared Captain Tod. "I made a mistake ever to be partners with him, out west as well as here. But once I was in I couldn't very easily

get out. While we were out west together we happened to save the life of a man named Harrison. He died soon after and he wanted to do something for us, so he practically left up this tract of land here on Long River, asking only a very small sum of money. Or, rather, he left it to me, but on account of my partnership with Slither that rascal claimed half interest in the land here, and he wasn't entitled to it, for I supplied the cash. At most Slither was entitled to only a share in a small tract. The main land, which was the most valuable, came to me. As a matter of fact it was I who saved the life of Old Man Harrison, and not Slither at all, but he stuck around.

"Well, I was so tangled with Slither that I couldn't get out. I knew a lawsuit would be long and costly, and so I hit on the scheme of driving him away from a place where he had no right to be. And he had no legal or moral right here or a share in my land. The plan I decided on, even before I came to your place, Rick, to buy a boat, was an Indian uprising.

"I had known Old Johnnie Green for years, and when I told him what I wanted he agreed to it. He and some of his old-time followers

staged the fake attack on our cabin, using the skin heads I gave them to make a new ceremonial dance drum."

Now Rick understood what had become of the toy drum his uncle had threatened to learn to play.

"I was scared," admitted Chot. "I surely was!"

"So was I," said Rick.

"But Slither was the most scared of all," chuckled the skipper, "and that's as I intended it. He surely thought he was going to be scalped. Ha! Ha! Why Johnnie Green wouldn't hurt a mosquito unless it stung him. And when I saw how things were going I played the game as I wanted to. After you boys had gone to bed I so worked on Slither's feelings that he said he'd clear out and leave the place to me to defend if the Indians came back—as I knew they would for I told them to.

"So I got Slither to sign a paper to that effect, giving up all his so-called partnership claim on this place, though, as a matter of fact he was never entitled to it. But I took that way of getting rid of him instead of going to law. It was cheaper and quicker for both of us. You

should have seen him skedaddle when Johnnie Green and his Indian friends came back toward morning!" he chuckled.

"He went out the back door on the run," said Chot.

"Everything worked as I intended it to," went on the skipper, "excepting me getting shot. That was what you'd call an added attraction," he said to the showman. "You see I forgot about the guns being loaded, even when I let Rick and Chot have 'em to stand guard, when no guard was needed. And then, after I'd got Slither to sign that paper, when you were asleep," and he looked at the two boys, "I happened to remember about the loads in the guns.

"I had dozed off and awoke with a start as I thought of the needless danger I might have put you lads in from the rifles, and as my gun slipped I made a grab for it, and got shot. Served me right, maybe, for trying to be too smart. But I'm glad it was no worse."

"Indeed you got out of it luckily," said Dr. Scott.

"But tell us what happened to you, Rick," urged the skipper, when all these surprising de-

tails had been made clear to the master of Ruddy.

"Oh, I had my own troubles," laughed the boy. "But I got there at last."

"You generally do," complimented Chot.

"If I had known what you were going through I'd have blamed myself a lot more than I did," said the captain. "I ought never to have tried this way of getting rid of Slither. I should have stuck to my first plan."

"What was that?" asked Rick.

"Well, I was going to pretend that I was clean gone crazy—out of my head. I knew Slither was mortally afraid of an insane person, and I figured that when he thought his partner was looney he'd quit—as he has done now. That's what I meant when you heard me saying crazy is as crazy does," the captain explained to Rick. "I planned to act crazy. Maybe that was foolish, and I'm glad I didn't. The fake Indian uprising was better."

"Oh, by the way, Rick," he went on "there's a letter of yours in my pocket. It dropped out when I was fixing the paper for Slither to sign, giving up his partnership here—a partnership he never was entitled to."

"A letter of mine?" repeated Rick, wonderingly.

"Well, one you gave me to mail some time ago, but it got down in the lining of my coat, and I never knew it until last night," said Captain Tod.

He pointed to the shelf over the stove, and Rick saw the letter he had written to his father suggesting the idea that Captain Tod might be insane. Rick was glad, now, that the letter had not gone. He took it down and destroyed it.

"Well, I guess this is about all," went on the skipper. "I'm much obliged to you, doctor, and to you, Mr. Driscoll. Of course what Rick did—"

"It wasn't anything!" interrupted the lad. "I'd do it again."

"I know you would," said his uncle, "but I'm hoping there'll be no need. Slither will never come back. Old Johnnie Green has him too frightened. Poor Old Johnnie Green, with his 'kick um hard—two bits!' Well, now that Slither is gone, I can go ahead and develop this place."

"Develop it!" exclaimed Dr. Scott. "What in the world is there up here to develop?"

"Salt!" was the captain's unexpected and short answer. "Salt! This land is filled with it, under the surface. It was specimens of salt rock, and the chemist's analyzing report, with my deeds and papers, that I had in the brass bound box," he explained to the boys. "I found the rocks down in a shaft where, maybe a hundred years ago, the Indians had dug for the white salt crystals. I had the salt analyzed by a chemist when I was on the trip I made to your place," he told Rick. "There's acres of salt under my land here, and I'm going to develop it. Slither had no rightful claim to it, but I would have had trouble proving it in a court of law. Now he's out of the way for good and all I can go ahead."

"Salt?" exclaimed Dr. Scott. "Salt around here?"

"Yes, of the very best kind. I think it will pay better to pump water down into the rock salt deposits and pump up the saturated solution of brine than to mine for the crystals. You'll see salt wells here soon," the skipper predicted.

And that is just what came to pass. The captain's surmise was right, for it was found

cheaper to obtain the salt in this way than to mine for the dry crystals. And soon not only his land, but other tracts around there, including some on the Indian reservation, were dotted with derricks which bored to the solid salt beneath the surface.

Then down into these holes water, from the many springs in the valley, was allowed to flow. Becoming saturated with salt, until the fluid was a heavy brine, it was pumped out and sent to a distant refinery.

This method of obtaining salt and its products is in vogue in the vicinity of Syracuse, in New York state, where the author lived as a boy, and many of the incidents of this book are taken from some of my own actual experiences.

That by way of digression.

Uncle Tod was right in believing that the salt under the land he had acquired from Old Man Harrison was of great value. The skipper eventually recovered his former fortune which was lost in unfortunate ventures in the west with Slither.

Some were inclined to criticise the skipper for the manner in which he got rid of Buck

Tooth Slither by arranging for a pretended Indian uprising. But even the most carping critics were silenced when it developed, as it did, that Slither was even more of a rascal than Captain Tod had stated. The runaway partner was not heard of again in those parts, and the small bit of land to which he was rightfully entitled had no salt on it, so he really lost nothing.

"If there had been salt under his property I'd have been the first to see that he got whatever money there was in it," said Captain Tod. But there was no need of this.

Rick suffered no ill effects from his rather perilous night journey, but it long remained a vivid memory with him, and perhaps with Ruddy also.

Captain Tod's injury rapidly healed in the clean, sweet outdoor air of Long River Camp, though it was some time before he could manage the *Sallie*. However he found plenty to do in directing the development of his salt mines, or wells, as they ought more properly to be called.

As for Rick, Ruddy and Chot, when they had written home about the good news, they settled down to enjoying themselves in Long River

Camp. The *Sallie* was repaired and the boys were allowed to run the craft themselves, with Captain Tod as an invalid passenger.

Dr. Scott, too, was often taken on trips up and down the river. Hokum Driscoll started his freak show, and it was most successful, even though he could not get a two-headed alligator. And he was frank enough to say he did not believe such an animal existed.

But Esmerelda, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the five-legged cow, the owl-headed rooster, together with other freaks picked up about the country—a snake “charmer,” a strong man and other attractions—made a show which satisfied Mr. Driscoll. It seemed to take with the public, too, for considerable money was taken in. The boys visited the attractions (free of course) when the show came to the town where Rick had gone to get Dr. Scott, and the lads, as well as Captain Tod, were glad to renew their acquaintance with Mrs. Driscoll and little Mary.

“Look at Esmerelda!” cried Rick, as he saw the four legged hen, and her ordinary chickens in a little coop.

“I really believes she knows me!” added

Chot, as the freak came close to the wire netting, and took some grains from Chot's hand.

"She's a lot more friendly than the owl-headed rooster!" laughed Rick. "Let's look at the porcupines!"

There they were, larger than ever, and just as bristly. The boys did not try to pat them—it would not have been wise.

"Where's the triple clam?" asked Chot, as Mr. Driscoll was showing them his freaks.

"Oh, that died on me, and I had to get rid of it. It wasn't much of a ballyhoo, anyhow, but it gave me a start and brought me luck. Any time you boys are in the neighborhood of my show, don't fail to stop in—the tent will always be open for you!"

"Thanks," murmured Chot and Rick, and Ruddy, with a wag of his tail, to say good-bye to Pet whom he had rescued from the water, joined his master and chum.

"That's right!" agreed Chot. "Say, do you reckon we'll ever again have as good and exciting a time as we had this summer?"

"Oh, maybe!" answered Rick.

Whether they did or not I shall leave you to decide, when you read the next volume of this

series, which will be called: "Rick and Ruddy Out West."

"Somebody's coming," remarked Chot a little later, as the silence of the darkness was broken by a trampling in the underbrush. "I hope it isn't Slither coming back."

It wasn't. A guttural, cheerful voice called:

"You kick um hard—two bits!"

"Johnnie Green!" cried the lads, joyously.

"Sure—um me!" grunted the Indian, stalking into the open. "Here basket for squaw sister," he added, holding several beautifully woven ones out to Rick. The boy had seen the Indian women making baskets and had wished for one to give Mazie. Johnnie Green had remembered this, and had also brought some for Chot.

"Oh, fine!" cried Rick, as he thanked the owner of the big stomach. "Mazie sure will like these!"

"Um!" grunted Johnnie Green, as he waddled off. He paused a moment, turned back and asked. "You no kick um? Two bits!"

"No—we no kick um!" laughed Chot. "Not to-night!"

And now, as it is time to "turn in," we will take leave of our boy friends, while Ruddy, with a sigh of contentment after an ample meal, stretches out and goes to sleep.

THE END

